New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1945

Volume VI, Number 18. • Yearly Subscription $15.00 • Week of November 19, 1945

1945 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1944 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
Anna Lucasta	143
Bell for Adano (A)	65
Bloomer Girl	118
Catherine Was Great	154
Cherry Orchard (The)	276
Chicken Every Sunday	232
Dear Ruth	56
Embezzled Heaven	97
Follow the Girls	222
Hand in Glove	67
Harvey	95
I Remember Mama	111
Jacobowsky and the Colonel	243
Laffing Room Only	52
Late George Apley (The)	77
Mexican Hayride	271
On the Town	45
Perfect Marriage (The)	104
Sadie Thompson	84
School for Brides	156
Searching Wind (The)	217
Seven Lively Arts	62
Sing Out, Sweet Land	48
Snafu	106
Soldier's Wife	121
Song of Norway	149
Sophie	50
Ten Little Indians	160
Trio	43

1943 Vol.

Carmen Jones	207
Kiss and Tell	356
Oklahoma	341
One Touch of Venus	264
Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304
Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

1940 Vol.

Life With Father	457

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 19, 1945.*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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1945 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1945

Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
Alice in Arms	278
And Be My Love	262
*Are You With It?	113
Assassin (The)	138
Beggars Are Coming to Town	133
Blue Holiday	216
Boy Who Lived Twice (A)	177
Calico Wedding	259
Carib Song	157
*Carousel	226
Common Ground	221
Concert-Varieties	200
*Dark of the Moon	252
*Deep Are the Roots	160
Deep Mrs. Sykes (The)	246
Devils Galore	174
Firebrand of Florence (The)	241
Foolish Notion	254
Foxhole in the Parlor	210
Girl from Nantucket (The)	121
*Glass Menagerie (The)	234
Good Night Ladies	290
Goose for a Gander (A)	286
Happily Ever After	250
Hasty Heart (The)	298
Hollywood Pinafore	203
Hope for the Best	271
It's a Gift	257
Kiss Them for Me	244
Lady in Danger	240
Lady Says Yes (A)	294
Live Life Again	154
Make Yourself at Home	172
Many Happy Returns	296
*Marinka	186
Memphis Bound	207
Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston	180
Next Half Hour (The)	130
Oh, Brother	195
One Man Show	269
Overtons (The)	274
Place of Our Own (A)	232
*Polonaise	149
Rebecca	288
*Red Mill (The)	141
*Rich Full Life (The)	118
Round Trip	213
*Rugged Path (The)	109
Ryan Girl (The)	168
*Secret Room (The)	124
Signature	264
Skydrift	106
Star Spangled Family	230
*State of the Union	102
Stranger (The)	266
Tempest (The)	283
*Therese	146
Too Hot for Maneuvers	220
*Up in Central Park	280
Wind Is Ninety (The)	192
*You Touched Me	164

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 19, 1945.*

THEATRE OPENINGS: "Skydrift," "The Rugged Path," "Are You With It?," "State of the Union"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

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"State of the Union"

The New York Times
NOVEMBER 15, 1945

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

While every boy inherits the right to grow up to be President of the United States, it takes additional talent to write a good play about it. This more important election was won last evening by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, whose "State of the Union" opened at the Hudson. With wonderfully funny lines and situations, this new comedy about politics also has enough sentiment to keep it from being farce, enough idea to show that its heart is in the right place. Probably "State of the Union" will not do away with the party system in America, but it at least has driven away the dark clouds hovering over the theatre. Twenty-four votes for Lindsay and Crouse.

* * *

Knowing which is the funny side, the authors are discussing the Republicans, although not all their shafts are aimed at the unfortunate eagle which has been absent these fourteen years. Their candidate for President happens to be a Republican, as well as an airplane manufacturer and an honest man. The political boss thinks that he might get the nomination and might thereafter win the election, and the play goes on to tell the conflict between a man who wishes to speak his mind and the cautious trading which will win the votes. He decides, finally, to say what he thinks, to tell off labor and industry when he wishes; the party nomination probably goes, but there is a hint the Presidency may not go with it. The time seems to be very soon, for Mr. Truman is mentioned, and possibly the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse have someone in mind.

In setting up their play the authors have done a remarkably crafty job. The lines flow along easily, and the humor comes from the characters. The Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse have been dabbling in politics a long time and they can be cynical about it. The jokes, although sharp, are good-natured, and they include the names of Stassen, President Truman and others for verisimilitude. About the serious side of their play, they are not joking at all. They do not see why a President cannot be chosen by the people of the country, why the candidate must speak softly about one problem in Wichita, about another in Detroit, why there is trading among politicians as a background. But "State of the Union" never is serious too long, funny too long; it is, in short, a good play.

The acting is of a part with the material, for Leland Hayward, the producer, and Bretaigne Windust, the director, have cast it perfectly. Ralph Bellamy is the potential candidate, and obviously he has been too interested in making airplanes—and getting interested in a woman newspaper publisher, by the way—to learn about politics. He gives just the right air of uncertainty to make the figure a real one. As the wife who loves him but who has wondered whether he returned it, Ruth Hussey also is good. On the political side, Minor Watson gives an authoratative performance as the political boss, and Myron McCormick gives another as a newspaper man turned cynical manager. Among the politicians there are some truly fine figures, including those portrayed by Aline McDermott, Victor Sutherland, Maidel Turner and G. Albert Smith; Mr. Windust has directed excellently.

Since a couple of states usually are out of step at election time, set down part of the second act as being too peaceful for comfort. But "State of the Union" wins by a landslide nevertheless.

'State of the Union'

A new comedy by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. Presented by Leland Hayward last night at the Hudson Theatre. Staged by Bretaigne Windust. Settings by Raymond Sovey.

THE CAST

James Conover	Minor Watson
Spike McManus	Myron McCormick
Kay Thorndyke	Kay Johnson
Grant Matthews	Ralph Bellamy
Norah	Helen Ray
Mary Matthews	Ruth Hussey
Stevens	John Rowe
Bellboy	Howard Graham
Waiter	Robert Toms
Sam Parrish	Herbert Heyes
Swenson	Fred Ayres Cotton
Judge J. D. Alexander	G. Albert Smith
Mrs. Alexander	Maidel Turner
Jennie	Madeline King
Mrs. Draper	Aline McDermott
William Hardy	Victor Sutherland
Senator Lauterback	George Lessey

New York Post
NOVEMBER 15, 1945

'State of the Union' a Good Comedy About Our Poiltics

By Wilella Waldorf

One of the toughest jobs a new Broadway play has to face is living up to its out-of-town notices. "State of the Union," by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, finally arrived at the Hudson Theatre last night and turned out to be an amusing comedy about politics that manages between laughs to get in some good natured cracks at the way we choose our presidents, and also to say a few unflattering but truthful words about the electorate—that is to say, us.

Unless you have kept your ears stuffed with cotton for the past few weeks, reports from the try-out tour must have led you to believe that "State of the Union" was the sensation of the decade. It isn't. It's just a good show. We advise you to see it but we also think it would be a good idea not to rush to the Hudson under the impression that a great, stupendous drama has come to town.

The best thing about "State of the Union" is that although its authors are obviously pretty serious about getting over a message to the people of the United States, they don't preach too much. And their message itself isn't anything too abstruse for the ordinary voter to understand.

The Lazy Electorate

Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse are simply engaged in pointing out that as things are now, it isn't the people who choose our presidents, but the politicians. Why don't the people do something about it? Because, in the words of one of the politicians, they're too damned lazy to vote in the primaries.

This leaves it up to the shrewd fellows who know how to run conventions and the idea is to put up somebody who's able to talk a lot without saying much of anything, thus offending as few voters as possible.

Grant Matthews, an airplane manufacturer, is a good speaker and he has a way of saying what he thinks on important subjects. People who hear him like the way he won't go in for political claptrap. He begins to look like presidential timber for the Republicans in 1948.

But it becomes increasingly evident there's a lot more to getting nominated for president than Matthews has any idea of. Furthermore the wife he hasn't been paying much attention to lately goes on tour with him for appearances' sake, and she doesn't believe in pulling any punches at all.

It finally becomes a question of whose sphere of influence is more powerful, the wife's or that of Matthews' mistress, a lady newspaper publisher, who's no mean politician herself.

A Good Company

"State of the Union" starts a bit slowly but once it gets under way it gains momentum fast. The third act is particularly diverting and also pretty exciting stuff.

Ralph Bellamy plays the industralist who believes in putting the good of the country, and of the world, ahead of selfish interests, a character that cannot fail to suggest the late Wendell Willkie in many respects. He does a good job of it and so do Minor Watson as the Republican boss and Myron McCormick as the Washington newspaperman who knows all the answers.

Ruth Hussey, who has the most difficult part in the play, brings it off more often than not, though she sometimes seems a trifle uncertain, and Kay Johnson is effective as the publisher who is her rival in more ways than one. There are a lot of good characterizations here and there in the large company.

"State of the Union" is full of entertaining dialogue.

"Tell me," says Mrs. Matthews to the Republican boss, a very likeable fellow, "is there any difference between the Democrats and the Republicans?"

"All the difference in the world," he replies. "They're in and we're out."

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

= By HOWARD BARNES =

The Theater Has a Winner

A LITERATE and amusing comedy has come to the Hudson to renew one's wavering faith in the theater. "State of the Union" is that happy combination of wit and sense which makes playgoing the delight it should be. Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse have written it wisely and well, fashioning a political satire which is as good-humored as it is pertinent. They have threaded it with engaging, and sometimes touching human relationships. With the excellent cast which Leland Hayward has selected for his production, Bretaigne Windust's sensitive direction and Raymond Sovey's handsome background, it is a shining show in a sultry season.

* * *

The authors have not minced matters in their exposition. They face the post-war hangover squarely in their account of the grooming of a Republican candidate for 1948. Real people are called by their real names and power politics are examined in ruthless detail. Even the potential President, who finally refuses to play ball with Republican bigwigs, is inheritor of another recent Republican candidate's philosophy of statesmanship. What is most important is the fact that "State of the Union," which might easily have stuttered indignantly, is eloquent and engaging. It tosses barbs at a great rate, but they are honeyed with good fun and persuasion.

* * *

It is the simple thesis of Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse that Americans should pull together instead of fighting among themselves in this perilous period of transition from war to peace. In a larger sense, the world is at stake in "The State of the Union." It is a big order for a piece of dramaturgy. On occasion, the action lags at the Hudson, the politico-dramatic issues become a bit fuzzy and the lines crackle rather mutely. But the work constantly quickens again to three exciting curtains. It winds up as an honest-to-goodness play, of all things, and one that does great credit to the current theater.

* * *

Ralph Bellamy and Minor Watson have the chief roles in the satire, with Myron McCormick acting as a cynically impish interlocutor. The first named is a successful airplane manufacturer, who is seized on by the party bosses to carry the Republican banner into the White House. He is torn between a case of "galloping self-importance," as his canny wife describes the symptoms, and an inherent blazing honesty. Watson plays a tough and hungry President maker, who tries to compromise the integrity of his would-be candidate, and McCormick is a right-thinking newspaper man, who turns campaign manager, but cannot control the enlightened and far-seeing business man. They are all three perfect for the parts, setting up and sustaining a tension of ideas and situations which keeps the comedy taut and absorbing.

* * *

As a secondary theme to the political shenanigans is the relationship of the presidential aspirant to his neglected wife and the feud of the latter with a lady publisher who pushes him into the national spotlight. Ruth Hussey as the wife, is wonderfully good, modulating her portrayal from frosty reserve, through tenderness, to a splendid championing of her husband's ideals and practicality. Kay Johnson brings a brittle brilliance to the role of the puppet manipulator which is exactly right for the role. The lesser parts are played as broadly as they are drawn. They constitute a rich fabric for the high comedy and the personal drama. "State of the Union" speaks out loud about things that need stating. It does so with gayety and conviction. It is a very welcome attraction on Broadway.

****

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

'State of the Union' Lively Political Satire

We have already learned to depend upon Leland Hayward to give any show he is connected with a quality production; and when he has a script from such intelligent and clever showmen as the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse, it is, as we say in the theater, in the bag that he has a hit.

Of the success of "State of the Union," which opened at the Hudson last night, there can be no reasonable doubt. It is entertaining; it is nice on the eyes and ears; it is instructive, witty, wise and bright.

It is a satire, of the most devastating kind. It depicts how a personable and well-intentioned palooka was groomed by politicos for the Presidency and about how he got out of hand. All this was because he had a wife and family and also a mistress, political obligations to this bunch, and financial obligations to that bunch, until the poor cnap didn't know where he stood. But he did keep a degree of personal integrity just when it looked as though he had lost every iota of it by the variety of demands made upon him. . . . And, thereby, lost all real chance of being elected President.

Irony with Effect.

It is an axiom in the theater that irony is to be avoided at all costs (for box office reasons) and that satire is profitable only when it is broadened to the extent of burlesque, as in the entertaining George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart comedies. "State of the Union" succeeds in being ironical and satirical in an unobtrusive and subtle way, yet manages to keep a popular appeal.

The story goes completely to pieces in the last scene of the last act. The wash-up is particularly unpalatable in that mat. a goes back to papa (although mama has a lover, who started out being a major and ended up by being a general). Also, because on his own account (and without any prompting from anybody, not even by his wife, mistress, campaign manager, labor leaders, representatives of big business or members of the Houses of Congress) he not only decided that Henry Wallace is right on all points about the future of the world but that his wife is suddenly attractive again.

He Didn't Understand.

The poor mut never did understand in the first place, that the efficient lady journalist (who had been twice divorced) had her own row to hoe and that, having trampled down a number of female competitors, she had an eye on being the mistress of the White House. She hoped the goof would divorce his wife soon enough to make this possible, even before the campaign set in.

There were complications about that. Political advisers were of the opinion that it would look nice before the newspaper and newsreel cameras if mama and papa were displayed to the public as lovey-dovies.

Point of the Play.

Privately mama was of the opinion that, although her husband was physically attractive and an excellent provider (who had made scads of money as the head of an aviation corporation) he was one of the worst stuffed shirts, one of the most conceited asses, one of the most unendurable phonies in the history of politics or business.

She found she had to fight—not him—but the female who was intellectually advising him on the "right course."

Everybody concerned lost out. And that is the point of the Lindsay-Crouse story: We can't get anywhere, if there is hate and political grooming and pandering to this pressure group or that one. We have got to have a life of even give-and-take, otherwise our civilization is lost. We can't play politics, nor can we submit to either of the solutions which Kay Johnson or Ruth Hussey propose in the play: They are two women who both want the wrong things in life—exhibitionistic prestige as the wife of a President or power of some sort or another. Neither of them wants life itself.

The acting in this show is especially commendable, as directed by Bretaigne Windust; and my bows are to Ralph Bellamy and Ruth Hussey (who is such a beauteous creature on the screen that I am deeply gratified to see that she is also a stage actress of competence and charm), and to Myron McCormick, Kay Johnson (who has a nasty role), G. Albert Smith, Maidel Turner, George Laudeback and, in fact, to the whole cast—every one of whom contributed to a very enjoyable and instructive evening in the theater for me. Raymond Sovey should also receive credit for having designed such pleasingly unobtrusive sets. This is a play worth your attention.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

'State of the Union,' Timely and Engaging Play, Expertly Acted and Directed.

By WALTER D MOREHOUSE.

Hold tight to the rail—something happened last night in 44th street. The professional theater is at work again. A brisk, entertaining and discerning play called "State of the Union" arrived at the Hudson and it's there for a long stay, Leland Hayward makes the presentation and he thereby performs something of a public service.

Those whimsical and sagacious fellows, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, are the authors of the Hudson's new play. They have deftly woven politics, a domestic story and observations on the state of the Union into a timely, topical and engaging piece of theater.

Their new comedy is hardly the playwriting masterpiece that advance reports led us to expect. It is somewhat too long, begins to wobble midway in the second act, and can stand some judicious cutting here and there. But it has a lot to say and says it well. It is expertly played and directed, and Hayward's production is extraordinarily good.

Lindsay & Crouse never forget that they are writing an entertainment, a show, and this fact is ever apparent as they comment on power politics, foreign policy, capital and labor, and love and marriage. And as a result "State of the Union" rarely sags as it provides one of the few worthwhile evenings that has come from the New York theater this season.

"State of the Union" presents the case of Grant Matthews, millionaire manufacturer of airplanes, a liberal and an idealist, who speaks his mind on national problems. He is definitely presidential material for 1948 in the minds of a woman publisher and the Republican boss, and he is persuaded to make a trial speaking tour, with the nomination as a possible reward. His marriage has been in a rather indecisive stage, but his beautiful and intelligent wife agrees to go along. All must be well with the home life of a presidential nominee.

In Detroit under pressure of his advisers, Matthews gives ground on the subject of reconversion; he is gradually going in for compromise. Finally, and just before he is about to declare himself on foreign policy, his wife intervenes. Her fiery wisdom convinces him that he is sacrificing principles and he renounces his political ambitions, thus freeing himself to go on being the constructively outspoken Citizen Matthews.

The domestic story, which also has its complications, is nicely intertwined with the political phases of the play. The authors have brought genuine feeling to the husband-and-wife relationship and they have made a real person out of the alert wife, who thinks her husband a great man when he is being himself. The role of Mary Matthews is played with charm and spirit by Ruth Hussey, always lovely to look upon. Hollywood has sent us a glamor girl who can act!

Ralph Bellamy gets a lot of variety and good playing into the part of Matthews. An intelligent actor, Bellamy, and an able one. Minor Watson, in the role of the G. O. P. boss, comes through wonderfully. He gives the appearance of having spent years in smoke-filled rooms. And Myron McCormick is a high-powered newspaper man who makes you feel he has actually been one. Kay Johnson, always welcome to Broadway, plays the role of the publisher, who is also a threat to the Matthews domestic felicity. Tremendously amusing performances are contributed by G. Albert Smith and Maidel Turner. Bretaigne Windust has helped along everything with his fine job of direction, and Raymond Sovey's four settings are excellent.

"State of the Union" is something of substance and perception. The Republican party, in its quest for presidential candidates for 1948, might well consider Howard Lindsay and Russel (Buck) Crouse.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

'State of the Union' Adult, Witty Play About Presidential Politics

By JOHN CHAPMAN

With "State of the Union" the current state of the theatre becomes enriched, for Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, the scenarists of "Life With Father," have made an adult, witty play about politics.

At its best, "State of the Union" examines the American political system with high-humored cynicism, and the play is spiced with verbal jabs and wisecracks. At its worst it is a shade too long and its pace falters, particularly in the third act, in which the authors, in an honest effort to be thorough, have too many characters saying too many things which, while amusing in themselves, rather neglect the job of driving the comedy home to its end.

It may be that the slight falling-off of pace can be corrected very simply by faster playing; if not, a small editing job should turn the trick. But, considering the overall excellence of "State of the Union" this trouble is minor.

Mr. Crouse and Mr. Lindsay have taken a successful, honest-spoken airplane manufacturer—perhaps a combination of Wendell Willkie and Henry J. Kaiser—and have groomed him to run for the Presidency in the 1948 election on the Republican ticket. They have traced his discovery as promising campaign material to a realistic politician of Washington and to a woman who publishes a chain of newspapers.

How a Candidate Looks.

They have watched him being bitten, and bitten hard, by the political bug. In the beginning, indeed, it would seem that they are going to make a stuffed shirt out of an honest but innocent guy. They have looked at him, not only through the practical eyes of the political boss and the calculating but beautiful orbs of the lady publisher, but also through the wise, humorous gaze of his acutely canny wife.

The authors have also managed a trick which escapes many a playwright—the successful mixing of politics with sex. Grant Matthews, the would-be candidate, has drifted from his wife and is under the easy-to-take spell of Kay Thorndyke, the publisher. The two women have a grim and catty battle in which the wife wins her husband back—not only back to herself but also back to political thinking about the peace of the world, rather than to mere political self-interest.

A Few Old Gags.

Stripped of its jokes and thrusts—and a few of the jokes, one must admit, are standard Republican-Democrat gags—and stripped of the sparkle given by some excellent performances, "State of the Union" would be an editorial. Its message is that ordinary politics—the playing against one another of labor, capital, agriculture, fragments of nationality and all the other elements that go into a campaign—this ordinary politics must now be abandoned. In its place must come a broader politics in which nations and people, instead of myriad pressure groups, must be thought of.

The acting of "State of the Union" is on a high level. Ruth Hussey is splendidly, intelligently right as the wife, and very handsome, too. Minor Watson is a fine, hard-bitten President-maker, and Ralph Bellamy manages the basic integrity and practical dumbness of the would-be candidate almost as well. Kay Johnson as the publisher, Myron McCormick as a newspaperman and a large number of players cast as tycoons, Southern judges, labor leaders, wives and whatnot are craftily chosen.

The direction by Bretaigne Windust is satisfying most of the time, but I do think he could give it a poke here and there. The four settings by Raymond Sovey are okay.

"State of

re a group killed in mission.

as it comes, you have tomo world, serio-comic narrative about ch to successful airplane-maker him. all wants to be Presider of the n United States. In the 44th st., make-believe, he is Grant Matthews. As Grant Matthews he is surrounded by the Kay Thorndyke who is his girl, the Mary Matthews who is his wife, and the James Conover who is his political guide, phony philosopher, fair-weather friend.

Stumping about the country from post to post to post, from Washington in the District of Columbia, to Detroit in the State of Michigan to Manhattan in the City of New York, Grant Matthews is pulled this way and that by the journalistic ambitions of his girl, the presidential ambitions of his wife and the political ambitions of his guide, philosopher and friend. Try as they do, they can't make up his mind. Neither can he, for quite a laugh-filled while.

It is his wife, his children's Matthews seem worthy of the appreciation and applause it received wholeheartedly. Miss Hussey, coming to the East Coast from the West, brings a freshness, a charm, a beauty and a skill the likes of which can not

away the confusion. The author does not hide his secrets of play construction, for at the end of the first act it is distressingly clear what is to follow, and after that attendance at the play becomes a waiting game, winner to take all.

The Motley settings and costumes are good and likewise one or two of the actors. For the most part they behave a little peculiarly, however, having a tendency to coudly chase home each of Mr. meiner's ideas and vignettes. Roy Es grave directed, a postponment does last week having been caused the injury in the course of duty. I'm gla counterp

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Journal American

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

'State of the Union' Opens at the Hudson

By ROBERT GARLAND

Yes, this is it... This "State of the Union" is the smash hit for which the theatrical season has been waiting. Written by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, produced by Leland Hayward with direction by Bretaigne Windust and settings by Raymond Sovey, acted by the "starred" Ralph Bellamy and Ruth Hussey and the "featured" Minor Watson, Myron McCormick and Kay Johnson, it is destined to delight both brighter and better customers till most of it comes true.

From a social-political point of view, there is more to "State of the Union" than meets casual ear and eye. These days, at the Hudson, you have only to be a haphazard sort of wise guy to put this one, that one and the other one together and add them up to such figures as you have in mind. Last night's smart, but not too bright first audience did exactly that. It had good mean fun down in the auditorium as it missed good clean fun up on the stage.

So, if I were you and sitting in the presence of "State of the Union" for the first fortunate time, I'd forget all about this one, that one and the other one. I'd eliminate all loose thinking and enjoy myself as I took the Howard Lindsay-Russell Crouse comedy straight, just as it comes.

* * *

Serio-Comic

Taking the Howard Lindsay-Russel Crouse play straight, just as it comes, you have tomorrow's world, serio-comic narrative about Mr. Jefferson Smith, successful airplane-maker who, all make-believe, wants to be President of the United States. In the 44th act, make-believe, he is Grant Matthews. As Grant Matthews he is surrounded by the Kay Thorndyke who is his girl, the Mary Matthews who is his wife, and the James Conover who is his political guide, phony philosopher, fair-weather friend.

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PM Exclusive

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

—Kronenberger—

Very Good News For a Change

PM Reviews

To this reviewer, afflicted by long weeks of grim playgoing with the theatrical shakes Mr. Howard Lindsay and Mr. Russel Crouse seem, this morning, like a dogsled that has finally brought the serum to Nome. To be less metaphorical, the two of them have presented us, in *State of the Union*, with an altogether enjoyable evening in the theater that, between laughs and even *through* laughs, gets something said that greatly needs to be said. They have rung the bell in terms of entertainment, and perhaps people will hear it in terms of something more important. For *State of the Union* is asking this country to work for an unselfish national unity and not revert, as it is already reverting—now that the war is over—to factionalism and strife. *State of the Union* is asking us also to work for world understanding and peace, and not to make a farce of the United Nations by stirring up international hatreds. And Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have dramatized their plea in a timely, plausible, concrete story about a man whom the Republican big boys try to groom for the Presidency in 1948, but who throws them over when he discovers the terms on which he would have to run.

State of the Union is not in the least a profound play; it is not really a play at all. It is a show. It bristles with wisecracks, it flashes with tag lines; much of it is slick, much of it breezy, some of it corn. But its very limitations are a virtue; by not trying to say too much, it says what it does with simple vigor; by not trying to cut too deep, it has its own kind of quick, sharp sting; by not becoming too involved about problems, it remains interesting about people. In spite of all its little tricks, its smartly tailored laughs, it is a really human play. Its characters, as far as they go, are lifelike and life-sized, believable and understandable. It is popular writing in a very good sense and a very useful sense; everybody will enjoy it and everybody will understand it.

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The Grant Matthews whom Lindsay and Crouse are writing about is an enormously successful airplane manufacturer who, now in November, 1945, sees the unity his country achieved through war already lost. Industry, labor, farmers are sitting in their own corners, with strife brewing; and he wants to get them all together again before something tragic happens. His mistress, who owns a big chain of newspapers, has got the Republican bosses interested in him for the Presidency, and Grant himself has the bug to be President. The Republicans think him good timber if he can be kept in line; but, first of all, of course, his liaison with the lady must be tucked out of sight, and he must be reunited with the wife from whom he is estranged. His wife agrees; his wife believes in all that he does; his wife, moreover, knows him through and through—his big-shot side, his vanity, his vacillations. And as the Party chiefs preach compromise to Grant, Mary Matthews preaches courage. It is she who finally wins out; Grant breaks with the big boys, to campaign on his own for what he believes.

In the plot sense, *State of the Union* is a comedy as well as a drama; is, indeed, a 1945 version of *What Every Woman Knows*, of the wife who makes the decisions for her husband and cleverly lets him think he is making them for himself. It is Mary and not Grant who emerges as the most important and interesting character in *State of the Union;* who brings to the evening at once the most force and the most fun. This being a show rather than a play, she is entitled, moreover, to her somewhat cornier triumphs, whether of farce-comedy at a crucial dinner-party, or of romance, in winning back her husband from the Other Woman.

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A virtually flawless production has everywhere enhanced the script of *State of the Union*. A cast that plays its human situations to the hilt, that gives a maximum of edge to its bright, breezy lines, makes you almost forget that *State of the Union* is over-long and in places under-nourished. Ralph Bellamy is a very good Grant, likeable and believable. Ruth Hussey, who seems at times like a defrosted Katharine Hepburn, is extremely effective and extremely attractive as Mary; she has something of a manner, but she gives it the value of a personality. Minor Watson is corking as a Republican big-shot; Myron McCormick just right as a newspaperman; Kay Johnson right, also, as the mistress; and almost every smaller part is very well played. Mr. Windust's direction is admirable.

State of the Union, a plea that never becomes a preachment, and a lot of fun to boot, deserves to be what it certainly will be—a smash hit. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

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The Sun

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

'State of the Union,' Timely and Engaging Play, Expertly Acted and Directed.

By WALTER D MOREHOUSE.

Hold tight to the rail—something happened last night in 44th street. The professional theater is at work again. A brisk, entertaining and discerning play called "State of the Union" arrived at the Hudson and it's there for a long stay, Leland Hayward makes the presentation and he thereby performs something of a public service.

Those whimsical and sagacious fellows, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, are the authors of the Hudson's new play. They have deftly woven politics, a domestic story and observations on the state of the Union into a timely, topical and engaging piece of theater.

Their new comedy is hardly the playwriting masterpiece that advance reports led us to expect. It is somewhat too long, begins to wobble midway in the second act, and can stand some judicious cutting here and there. But it has a lot to say and says it well. It is expertly played and directed, and Hayward's production is extraordinarily good.

Lindsay & Crouse never forget that they are writing an entertainment, a show, and this fact is ever apparent as they comment on power politics, foreign policy, capital and labor, and love and marriage. And as a result "State of the Union" rarely sags as it provides one of the few worthwhile evenings that has come from the New York theater this season.

"State of the Union" presents the case of Grant Matthews, millionaire manufacturer of airplanes, a liberal and an idealist, who speaks his mind on national problems. He is definitely presidential material for 1948 in the minds of a woman publisher and the Republican boss, and he is persuaded to make a trial speaking tour, with the nomination as a possible reward. His marriage has been in a rather indecisive stage, but his beautiful and intelligent wife agrees to go along. All must be well with the home life of a presidential nominee.

In Detroit under pressure of his advisers, Matthews gives ground on the subject of reconversion; he is gradually going in for compromise. Finally, and just before he is about to declare himself on foreign policy, his wife intervenes. Her fiery wisdom convinces him that he is sacrificing principles and he renounces his political ambitions, thus freeing himself to go on being the constructively outspoken Citizen Matthews.

The domestic story, which also has its complications, is nicely intertwined with the political phases of the play. The authors have brought genuine feeling to the husband-and-wife relationship and they have made a real person out of the alert wife, who thinks her husband a great man when he is being himself. The role of Mary Matthews is played with charm and spirit by Ruth Hussey, always lovely to look upon. Hollywood has sent us a glamor girl who can act!

Ralph Bellamy gets a lot of variety and good playing into the part of Matthews. An intelligent actor, Bellamy, and an able one. Minor Watson, in the role of the G. O. P. boss, comes through wonderfully. He gives the appearance of having spent years in smoke-filled rooms. And Myron McCormick is a high-powered newspaper man who makes you feel he has actually been one. Kay Johnson, always welcome to Broadway, plays the role of the publisher, who is also a threat to the Matthews domestic felicity. Tremendously amusing performances are contributed by G. Albert Smith and Maidel Turner. Bretaigne Windust has helped along everything with his fine job of direction, and Raymond Sovey's four settings are excellent.

"State of the Union" is something of substance and perception. The Republican party, in its quest for presidential candidates for 1948, might well consider Howard Lindsay and Russel (Buck) Crouse.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

'State of the Union' Adult, Witty Play About Presidential Politics

By JOHN CHAPMAN

With "State of the Union" the current state of the theatre becomes enriched, for Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, the scenarists of "Life With Father," have made an adult, witty play about politics.

At its best, "State of the Union" examines the American political system with high-humored cynicism, and the play is spiced with verbal jabs and wisecracks. At its worst it is a shade too long and its pace falters, particularly in the third act, in which the authors, in an honest effort to be thorough, have too many characters saying too many things which, while amusing in themselves, rather neglect the job of driving the comedy home to its end.

It may be that the slight falling-off of pace can be corrected very simply by faster playing; if not, a small editing job should turn the trick. But, considering the overall excellence of "State of the Union" this trouble is minor.

Mr. Crouse and Mr. Lindsay have taken a successful, honest-spoken airplane manufacturer—perhaps a combination of Wendell Willkie and Henry J. Kaiser—and have groomed him to run for the Presidency in the 1948 election on the Republican ticket. They have traced his discovery as promising campaign material to a realistic politician of Washington and to a woman who publishes a chain of newspapers.

How a Candidate Looks.

They have watched him being bitten, and bitten hard, by the political bug. In the beginning, indeed, it would seem that they are going to make a stuffed shirt out of an honest but innocent guy. They have looked at him, not only through the practical eyes of the political boss and the calculating but beautiful orbs of the lady publisher, but also through the wise, humorous gaze of his acutely canny wife.

The authors have also managed a trick which escapes many a playwright—the successful mixing of politics with sex. Grant Matthews, the would-be candidate, has drifted from his wife and is under the easy-to-take spell of Kay Thorndyke, the publisher. The two women have a grim and catty battle in which the wife wins her husband back—not only back to herself but also back to political thinking about the peace of the world, rather than to mere political self-interest.

A Few Old Gags.

Stripped of its jokes and thrusts—and a few of the jokes, one must admit, are standard Republican-Democrat gags—and stripped of the sparkle given by some excellent performances, "State of the Union" would be an editorial. Its message is that ordinary politics—the playing against one another of labor, capital, agriculture, fragments of nationality and all the other elements that go into a campaign—this ordinary politics must now be abandoned. In its place must come a broader politics in which nations and people, instead of myriad pressure groups, must be thought of.

The acting of "State of the Union" is on a high level. Ruth Hussey is splendidly, intelligently right as the wife, and very handsome, too. Minor Watson is a fine, hard-bitten President-maker, and Ralph Bellamy manages the basic integrity and practical dumbness of the would-be candidate almost as well. Kay Johnson as the publisher, Myron McCormick as a newspaperman and a large number of players cast as tycoons, Southern judges, labor leaders, wives and whatnot are craftily chosen.

The direction by Bretaigne Windust is satisfying most of the time, but I do think he could give it a poke here and there. The four settings by Raymond Sovey are okay.

Journal American

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

'State of the Union' Opens at the Hudson

By ROBERT GARLAND

Yes, this is it...This "State of the Union" is the smash hit for which the theatrical season has been waiting. Written by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, produced by Leland Hayward with direction by Bretaigne Windust and settings by Raymond Sovey, acted by the "starred" Ralph Bellamy and Ruth Hussey and the "featured" Minor Watson, Myron McCormick and Kay Johnson, it is destined to delight both brighter and better customers till most of it comes true.

From a social-political point of view, there is more to "State of the Union" than meets casual ear and eye. These days, at the Hudson, you have only to be a haphazard sort of wise guy to put this one, that one and the other one together and add them up to such figures as you have in mind. Last night's smart, but not too bright first audience did exactly that. It had good mean fun down in the auditorium as it missed good clean fun up on the stage.

So, if I were you and sitting in the presence of "State of the Union" for the first fortunate time, I'd forget all about this one, that one and the other one. I'd eliminate all loose thinking and enjoy myself as I took the Howard Lindsay-Russell Crouse comedy straight, just as it comes.

* * *

Serio-Comic

Taking the Howard Lindsay-Russel Crouse play straight, just as it comes, you have tomorrow's serio-comic narrative about the successful airplane-maker who wants to be President of these United States. In the 44th st. make-believe, he is Grant Matthews. As Grant Matthews he is surrounded by the Kay Thorndyke who is his girl, the Mary Matthews who is his wife, and the James Conover who is his political guide, phony philosopher, fair-weather friend.

Stumping about the country from post to post to post, from Washington in the District of Columbia, to Detroit in the State of Michigan to Manhattan in the City of New York, Grant Matthews is pulled this way and that by the journalistic ambitions of his girl, the presidential ambitions of his wife and the political ambitions of his guide, philosopher and friend. Try as they do, they can't make up his mind. Neither can he, for quite a laugh-filled while.

It is his wife, his children's Matthews seem worthy of the appreciation and applause it received wholeheartedly. Miss Hussey, coming to the East Coast from the West, brings a freshness, a charm, a beauty and a skill the likes of which can not be under-rated. Ralph Bellamy's Grant Matthews is equally on the right side. Last night his presidential possibilities suffered from nothing but a cold.

Myron McCormick, accustomed to being good in starring parts, is better than I have ever seen him as Spike McManus, a not-too-composite portrait of a major member of the Capital's Fourth Estate. Minor Watson also outdoes himself as James Conover, the piece's practical politician. I'm glad I helped elect his canny counterpart. Kay Johnson, as America's prettiest publisher, is good enough to be true. Maidel Turner's Mrs. Alexander from N'Orleans is grand.

George Bernard Shaw once remarked that the way to make a theatre-playgoer swallow an unpleasant truth is to open his mouth with laughter, then shove the unpalatable lesson down his throat. Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse take him at his word in "State of the Union," a very funny, very serious, very welcome play ...Yes, this is it, most certainly.

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PM Exclusive

NOVEMBER 15, 1945

—Kronenberger—

Very Good News For a Change

PM Reviews

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State of the Union is not in the least a profound play; it is not really a play at all. It is a show. It bristles with wisecracks, it flashes with tag lines; much of it is slick, much of it breezy, some of it corn. But its very limitations are a virtue; by not trying to say too much, it says what it does with simple vigor; by not trying to cut too deep, it has its own kind of quick, sharp sting; by not becoming too involved about problems, it remains interesting about people. In spite of all its little tricks, its smartly tailored laughs, it is a really human play. Its characters, as far as they go, are lifelike and life-sized, believable and understandable. It is popular writing in a very good sense and a very useful sense; everybody will enjoy it and everybody will understand it.

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State of the Union, a plea that never becomes a preachment, and a lot of fun to boot, deserves to be what it certainly will be—a smash hit. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

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"Skydrift"

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 14, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

'Skydrift' Ambitious but Ineffective Ghostly Drama

A playwright who knows what life after death is like is bound to meet up with skeptics, like myself, who are not sure he is right. Therefore, Harry Kleiner, the author of "Skydrift," which opened at the Belasco last night, may pity me, but he will be charitable toward me when I say that "Skydrift" ought to make a good Grade B movie but is not (I think) the last word on what we have to face when we die. At least I hope not.

"Skydrift" is sincerely written. It has moments of deep poignancy. It is by a man who obviously hates war as much as Bill Mauldin does. The whole last half of the play, in fact, is a stage presentation of a series of very bitter Mauldin cartoons. If the whole show had been presented on this level I would say that Mr. Kleiner had written a play of genuine value.

Unfortunately, Mr. Kleiner has seen too many movies of paratroopers bailing out; and so he has cluttered up his drama with an eye to what has proved effective, in the past, in portrayals of war heroism on the screen. He has been correctly advised, technically, in many details.

The costumes of his paratroopers are authentic (thanks to Motley, designer of costumes for the show). I am also informed —by the movies—that in this war paratroopers shot craps; that they looked at magazine pictures frowned upon by the Postmaster General; that some of them got the bends in emergencies and had to be slapped out of it by their C. O.; that their language was sometimes rough and that the members of any combat crew got to liking each other by the simple process of loathing each other. "Skydrift" confirmed my information on these points.

But, although my technical knowledge of planes is elementary, I do know this: That had they opened the parachute-jump door at the speed they were supposed to be going, and kept it open as long as they did, nine actors in "Skydrift" wouldn't be playing at the Belasco tonight; they would be somewhere in New Jersey, with searching parties trying to find them.

I don't advise those who have lost fathers, sons or sweethearts in this war to see this show; for it pulls the tear strings of those who have been in grief much too patently. And this is rather strange, inasmuch as the whole idea of Mr. Kleiner's play is to tell those who have lost loved ones in this war to forget. He has a curious idea of how to make people forget things.

The story is that a plane, carrying paratroopers, is shot down, with all lives lost, and that each one of these men, in the afterlife, reappears in spirit to those who grieve for them and ask them to forget their grief and carry on —except for one, the crew chief (Eli Wallach), who in death returns to haunt his widow, who he thinks has been a tramp in his absence. She is tortured by this idea herself; but she hasn't been. She is only another forlorn victim of the war, quite as dead, spiritually, as her husband is dead physically.

The direction of this show, by Roy Hargrave, is all that could be wished. The acting, by the entire cast, was more than equal to a very disordered, though ambitious, script.

'SKYDRIFT.'

Play by Harry Kleiner; staging by Roy Hargrave; settings and costumes designed by Motley; presented by Rita Hassan at the Belasco Theater Tuesday, November 13, 1945. The cast:

Pvt. Paul Rennart	Paul Crabtree
Cpl. Kenneth Brody	Elliott Sullivan
Pvt. Fitzroy Donovan	Arthur Keegan
Pvt. Mario Bucelli	Zachary A. Charles
Pvt. Edward Freling	William Chambers
Co-pilot	Sid Martoff
Pvt. Nickie Bucelli	Carl Sperbt
Crew Chief	Eli Wallach
Sgt. Robert A. Kane	Alfred Ryder
Fraway	Olive Deering
Danny	Marty Miller
Mrs. Bucelli	Lili Valenty
Mr. Bucelli	Wolfe Barzell
Angelina	Rosita Cuolo
Audra	Elsbeth Hofmann

Journal American

NOVEMBER 14, 1945

'Skydrift' Appears On Belasco Stage

By ROBERT GARLAND

This "Skydrift" is a baffler, if ever Broadway had one. Last night, at the Belasco, it had everybody baffled. This everybody included Harry Kleiner, the author; Rita Hassan, the producer; Roy Hargrave, the director; The Motleys, the designers; Butch Schweitzer, the ticket-taker; the actors, 15 members of Equity, and me. There were moments in 44th St. when even the stagehands were quite obviously frustrated.

Nobody, from that earnest author of "Skydrift" to this earnest reviewer for the Journal-American, knew what, if anything, was supposed to be going on beneath the clatter of machinery and the confusion of tongues getting in each other's way on the Belasco's long-suffering stage.

Sound was there, and not a little fury. But, like their celebrated Shakespearian counterparts, they signified nothing.

This was not right. This was wrong as wrong can be! For the author of "Skydrift," the undeniably sincere Harry Kleiner who is trying to say something significant in the worst possible way, is his own most ardent antagonist.

How can he expect you or me or the other firstnighter to know what is on his mind when he doesn't know himself? Or, if he does know, can't translate it into words and action?

* * *

Unreal Reality

To point out that "Skydrift" is derivative is to point to one of its major handicaps. When not suggesting "Journey's End," it is suggesting "Outward Bound." When not suggesting "Outward Bound," it is suggesting "The Wind is Ninety." And when not suggesting "The Wind Is Ninety," it is suggesting that its playwright is prone to think in terms of the theatre rather than reality.

There is no denying that the talk and action in the initial sequence, in the air aboard a transport-bomber, is as technically correct as it is profane and hysterical. One Edward Murray, former officer in our 101st Airborne Division, has been called in to attend to that. Because he has and does, it is enlightening to rediscover how unreal reality can be when reproduced realistically on a lighted platform.

Nevertheless, "Skydrift" holds provocatively together until the transport-bomber crashes and the men in uniform who are its passengers and crew wake up—dead!

It is then that Harry Kleiner's play goes definitely to pieces. It seems that life after death is more unendurable than life before death, especially to a soldier. It seems that a soldier wants to die, but his dear ones just won't let him.

Serious Nonsense

All this, I think, is long-faced nonsense. It is nonsense, I am sure, as projected at the Belasco under Roy Hargrave's now-I-understand-it-now-I-don't direction. Along with the author, the producer, the designers and the ticket-taker, Mr. Hargrave is baffled by the playwright's inability to make his meaning clear. Soon, along with me, he gives up trying and merely waits and wonders.

Alfred Ryder and his sister, Olive Deering, have graduated from the GI grease paint of "Winged Victory" to the non-GI grease paint of "Skydrift." Elliott Sullivan is also an alumnus of Moss Hart's saga of the AAF. They, too, are baffled. So are Paul Crabtree, out of "Oklahoma," Zachary Charles, out of "Live Life Again," and Lili Valenty, out of "Pick Up Girl" and the late German theatre.

But, getting back to the beginning, last night's arrival is truly a baffler of a play and all its players give the impression of being baffled along with it. Likewise its producer. Likewise its director. Likewise me!...If sincerity were a playwright, if that playwright were Harry Kleiner, then "Skydrift" would be an event of rare theatrical importance. But, to tell the truth, it isn't.

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 14, 1945

The Ghost Plane

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Still they come out of the great blue yonder, last night's having been "Skydrift", by Harry Kleiner. A fantasy, it has practically everything that can be wrong with a straight play, plus those special ones reserved for its own classification. It is long, unbelievable, unmoving, talky and obviously set up so that a seat squirmer will rotate on his axis like a dervish. As someone was saying only the other day, this has been a very peculiar season, indeed, and when its final history is written, "Skydrift" should have quite a nice little niche for itself. As the Broadway saying goes, it is not good.

Mr. Kleiner's people are a group of paratropoers who are killed in their plane while on a mission. Jumping from this other world, they again land on earth, each to see what had been nearest to him. One has a young wife, one—a ball player—the mascot of his team, two have their parents. The author's philosophical thesis seems to be that so long as those who are left will go on with life, they will be serving those who have departed. Mr. Kleiner's thesis is open to misinterpretation, however, for at no time is it very clear, and at no time is "Skydrift" helping to blow away the confusion. The author does not hide his secrets of play construction, for at the end of the first act it is distressingly clear what is to follow, and after that attendance at the play becomes a waiting game, winner to take all.

The Motley settings and costumes are good and likewise one or two of the actors. For the most part they behave a little peculiarly, however, having a tendency to loudly chase home each of Mr. Kleiner's ideas and vignettes. Roy Hargrave directed, a postponment from last week having been caused by his injury in the course of duty.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 14, 1945

'Skydrift' a War Fantasy About Paratroopers Killed in Action

By Wilella Waldorf

"Skydrift," which arrived at the Belasco Theatre last night, is another play about dead soldiers who decide to visit their folks in a mistaken effort to help them bear the blow. It is probable the author once saw "Outward Bound" and was powerfully impressed by it.

A demolition squad of paratroopers, consisting of a sergeant and six men, is flying over a Japheld island in the Pacific and is about to jump on the target when enemy planes blow the outfit up. At first they imagine everything's O. K. but the sergeant thinks it's funny their watches have all stopped at the same moment. Furthermore he looks outside and sees "nothing but dawn" all the way up and all the way down.

They finally realize they're dead. After performing their own funeral service, six of them—all but the sergeant—put on their parachutes again and make a final jump into the dawn to find out how things are at home.

The actual battle with the Japs is noisy, often exciting, and doubtless authentic down to the last detail, but after the shooting is over things bog down pretty badly. For one thing, anyone who gets around to the Broadway theatre regularly will by this time have been reminded rather forcibly of "The Wind Is Ninety," in which an Air Force officer shot down in combat returned to see his family, accompanied by a private of World War I somewhat unaccountably identified as the Unknown Soldier.

In "Skydrift" no less than six men take off for home, and although two of them are brothers and are therefore bound for the same place, the prospect begins to look very dreary indeed, since it has become fairly evident by this time that the author, though enamored of his idea, has nothing much to contribute to the world's fund of philosophical discussion about life after death.

There is very little to hold the interest during the two final acts, therefore, but Motley's scenic effects, which are worthy a better play, and a mild curiosity now and again as to whether this particular author subscribes to the theory that the living can see and hear the dead when they return, or that they can't.

Finally even the sergeant, who had stayed behind, has his fling on earth as well as the other six —visiting a particularly repulsive girl friend who's decided to marry somebody else because she can't stand waiting.

Roy Hargrave has directed all this with great attention to detail. The acting is for the most part good. But the evening as a whole we found exhausting.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 14, 1945.

Paratroopers Jump But 'Skydrift' Plops

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There is on the market a fountain pen about which advertising writers have waxed, to ease the news to you gently, enthusiastic. It won't blot. It will write under water, in case you want to drop somebody a will while drowning. It will write on a ceiling if you ever get up there. A young playwright named Harry Kleiner seems to have improved upon this lovely instrument —for the pen he certainly must use not only does all of these remarkable things but also writes not in ink, but in pure benzedrine.

Mr. Kleiner's play, "Skydrift," was presented at the Belasco Theatre last night. It has the most novel settings and the most expert lighting one could wish, and as a physical production it is a gem; but the trouble about it is that people have to talk in it, and all of their talk is as hysterical as a caption for a composograph in Bernarr Macfadden's New York Graphic.

I think Mr. Kleiner has been frightened in childhood and youth by a number of things. The clipped dialogue of an early Hemingway or late Lardner short story, for one. The lovely play, "Outward Bound," for another. The fine movie, "Here Comes Mr. Jordan," for a third. And maybe he saw "The Wind Is Ninety" a few months ago, when he was beginning to grow up.

The Dead Jump Home.

As a result Mr. Kleiner has driven himself nearly crazy with a mystical drama about a planeful of paratroopers who are about to jump into enemy territory but who get killed in midair by ack-ack. So, instead of jumping on enemies they 'chute back home and have high-fevered but meaningless conversations with wives, sweethearts, parents and kid brothers and sisters.

When it all is over neither the paratroopers nor the customers at the Belasco are any the wiser, and this is a pity, for "Skydrift" is really a lovely production. (Note to Dick Weaver, publicity man for the play: If you ever put in the ads, "Lovely Production — Chapman, News," I shall haunt you.)

There are fifteen actors in "Skydrift" and I haven't a complaint against thirteen of them. But the stars of the play are not the actors, nor is the bemused author one of them. The stars are two women scenic designers who call themselves Motley, a scenery builder named T. B. McDonald and a director named Roy Hargrave. Hargrave gets his star not for direction, which is as hysterical as the author's own words, but for an admirable job of stage lighting.

Hint to a Playwright.

The Motleys—and it's time these ladies used their own names because they are very good and Motley sounds like a gag—have designed the interior of a transport in flight which is quite wonderful. They also have designed settings for the return of dead paratroopers to the living world which are simple and beautiful . . . a blue backdrop laced with shroud lines, a billowing fragment of a 'chute and whatever setting they want to put beneath, like a house, or the interior of a simple home, or a booth in a night club.

If Mr. Kleiner should ever feel another play coming upon him, I suggest that he take a couple of sleeping tablets and, under their drowsy influence, use a post office pen, a bank pen, or even a reasonably well-sharpened quill. He will rest better, and so shall I.

"Skydrift"—*continued*

New York Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 14, 1945

By HOWARD BARNES

Soldiers Outward Bound

THE new war play that has come to the Belasco, "Skydrift," is a turbulent tear-jerker. Harry Kleiner has premised his work on the violent death of a group of paratroopers just before V-J Day. That premise alone carries tremendous emotional freight. When the author has given it theatrical substance and meaning, it is somberly absorbing. His talk is frequently incisive; his air-borne soldiers and those at home who try to hold them in death are often recognizable people. But on the whole this is a muddled and mannered show.

For one thing Kleiner has been in a considerable quandary in choosing a realistic or symbolic approach to his material. The production starts with a noisy and pyrotechnic account of the shooting down of a transport plane carrying paratroopers on their final mission before a well earned leave. With a nod to "Outward Bound," it turns up the company in a limitless dawn, with all watches stopped at the exact moment of its annihilation by Jap Zeros. One by one the men return to the things they cherished on earth, and more than one eloquent and moving passage emerges with honest documentation from the fantasy. The truth is that the author has solved his quandary by taking whacks at a variety of approaches to his subject.

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He is at his best when he is most simple. The savage camaraderie of the kangaroos as they prepare to jump behind Jap lines or reconvene after renewing their contacts with the world of the living is stated in lucid and gripping passages. Their ghostly visitations are occasionally poignant, particularly that of two Italian youngsters, whose mother refuses to believe them dead, and that of a tough corporal, who talks baseball and wisdom to his former mascot. Unfortunately, the prose becomes very purple at the most unlikely moments, while the action has a tendency to be directed by the symbolism, rather than accenting it.

The players, several of whom might have been seen in "Winged Victory," give more than adequate interpretations of their roles. Alfred Ryder is splendidly restrained and bitter as the sergeant who wants no part of earth but must make a reckoning with a lost love. As a gay Irishman, who had one week of happiness with his wife before shoving off into the Pacific horizons, Arthur Keegan is right as right can be, and Olive Deering is fine as the girl he left behind. Zachary A. Charles and Carl Specht are good as the Italian-American boys, and Lili Valenti's portrayal of their mother is serenely touching. The show has not benefited from Roy Hargrave's mannered staging. It merely makes "Skydrift" seem more mannered than it actually is.

PM

NOVEMBER 14, 1945

—Kronenberger—

No Respect For the Dead

PM Reviews

"There is nothing more dreadful," says Goethe somewhere, "than imagination without taste." That dictum will begin, at least, to explain why Mr. Kleiner's fantasy of dead paratroopers who make one last visit to earth is so immitigably, so irreclaimably bad. Mr. Kleiner has invested his idea with a maximum of the maudlin, the obvious and the ill-considered; it is hard to think, once he has turned his men into revenants, of a single thing he has done right. And the worst thing about *Skydrift* is that after its opening scene it is as great a bore as it is a botch.

The opening scene, which pictures the paratroopers making tense preparations for jumping from a plane, and being shot down at the precise moment when they are to jump, is far too long and too unevenly written, but often good theater. With cutting and rewriting, it could make an effective one-acter. But with that *Skydrift* plunges to its ruin. In the following scene, where the men discover they are dead and conduct their own funeral services and somehow will their return to earth, Mr. Kleiner is everywhere mawkish, tasteless and dramatically flat. The scenes that follow—one man returning to his wife, another to his child, two others to their parents—drop successively lower. These visits, in Mr. Kleiner's scheme, presumably bring to the dead men the peace that comes from knowing they are loved; then, by contrast, comes a dead sergeant's visit to the woman who had jilted him, which brings wrangling and recriminations. But it offers no contrast in quality.

Skydrift, being that extremely difficult undertaking, an episodic play, and that extraordinarily dangerous undertaking, a fantasy about the dead, would be a challenge to the most skilful of playwrights. For one with Mr. Kleiner's limitations, it could only be a catastrophe. Nor is the production a very shining one. Roy Hargrave has done nothing to soft-pedal the sentimentality, and some of the acting is downright awful. Alfred Ryder as the sergeant, and Zachary Charles and Arthur Keegan as two of the paratroopers, have a certain force; and O'ive Deering plays the wife with helpful simplicity. The very good Motley settings are worthy of a far better play.

—Louis Kronenberger

The Sun

NOVEMBER 14, 1945

The Dead Walk the Stage in 'Skydrift,' It Dies Completely as a Play.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Another play of life after death, this one entitled "Skydrift," reached Broadway via the Belasco last night, being presented by Rita Hassan. There is a measure of excitement in the trickily staged opening scene but when the jump-happy paratroopers meet their doom the play dies with them.

Harry Kleiner, a dramatist new to the New York stage, wrote "Skydrift." He reveals a talent for sharp and lusty speech. A lot of the talk of the young men of airborne combat, when it can be heard above the roar of the plane and the drive of Roy Hargrave's direction, is good talk. But "Skydrift," taken as a play, is maudlin and cumbersome, and is one that provides a completely enervating evening in the theater.

Kleiner is writing about seven paratroopers, on a combat mission above a Jap-held island. They are preparing to hit the silk. Before they jump, however, the enemy attacks fiercely and their transport plane is shattered. All seven are killed.

Now the fantasy of "Skydrift" sets in. The seven find themselves dead and their thoughts turn to home and of the deprivations that sudden death has brought. The sergeant of the group pleads with them to be content with their fate and to avoid the tears, the bitterness, the disillusionments, that a return to their loved ones will reveal. But mutinously, they decide to go back and six of them jump into the enveloping dawn.

One returns to his troubled and bitter young wife, to whom he was married for but a week before he went away to war. Another revisits a small boy. Two brothers return to their squabbling Italian father and mother. And finally the sergeant himself goes back to his girl—and wishes he hadn't. The seven paratroopers come to realize that there is peace for them only in thir reunion in death, and it is their resolve to stay dead.

"Skydrift" fails utterly as a combination of realism and fantasy, notwithstanding Harry Kleiner's feeling for words and for dialogue, as demonstrated in the grim, before-jump talk of the paratroopers and in the well-written reunion-on-earth scene between Private Fitzroy Donovan, quite dead, and his wife, Francey, who has years of uncertain living ahead.

Olive Deering is the paratrooper's grieving young wife, resentful of his having been taken away, and she does it beautifully. Alfred Ryder plays the sergeant with great force. There are good performances from Arthur Keegan and Elliott Sullivan and Zachary A. Charles. And one of the season's worst from an actress in the cast. Roy Hargrave's direction keeps you interested for a time in the proceedings at the Belasco, even though the violence of it prevents a lot of the speech from being audible.

The theater slips again in venturing into the supernatural. "Skydrift" won't do.

"The Rugged Path"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

By Howard Barnes

Smoothed by Tracy

ROBERT E. SHERWOOD has mistaken a stage for a podium in "The Rugged Path." His new play has flashes of dramatic urgency and excitement. It has passages of rare and provocative eloquence. Moreover Spencer Tracy is on hand at the Plymouth to make one realize how sorely the theater has missed this great actor during the fifteen years he has dedicated to movie make-believe. The fact remains that the Playwrights' Company offering emerges as a series of animated editorials rather than a challenging and absorbing play. For all its sincerity and right-mindedness, "The Rugged Path" is self-conscious, wordy and disappointing behind footlights.

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The author is far more successful with his characters than with his construction. His chief figure is a man to remember, particularly since Tracy interprets it with depth and subtlety after a jittery start. A liberal newspaper editor, suspected of pinkish tendencies, Sherwood's hero gives up trying to convince reactionary isolationists that a war is inevitable, enlists in the Navy, is torpedoed off the Philippines, and is killed fighting with guerrillas. The other people of the play have vitality and individuality, from the tough, self-seeking business manager of a newspaper to a grizzled Army colonel who has escaped from the Japanese to direct a holding action in the South Pacific.

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Unfortunately, they have rarely been implicated in a cumulative and absorbing dramatic unity. Separate scenes stand out with far more prominence than they should in a work which embraces a dozen such. A vivid description of the death of a destroyer is followed by a desultory conversation piece. The engrossing climax of zero hour in a guerrilla action is vitiated in a final scene which is lush with high-flown and meaningless phrases. Sherwood has written about an intelligent man finding himself in a world crisis, but he has hobbled his script with a windy commentary which is frequently downright dull.

* * *

Tracy, being in nearly every scene, gives the production an authority which is not always evident in the action and dialogue. Whether he is telling off his bosses for their ostrich-like complacency or addressing a ragged company before he is clipped by a Jap bullet, he floods scenes with energy and emotional meaning. It is good to see him acting on the stage again. It would be better had he a more effective chunk of theater. Martha Sleeper is excellent as the editor's wife; Lawrence Fletcher gives a brilliant portrayal of the business manager; Clay Clement is perfect as the army colonel, and the others are generally first-rate. Captain Garson Kanin's staging lacks little. It is the play that is deficient in "The Rugged Path." Once more the war years have eluded dramatic definition.

'THE RUGGED PATH.'

Play by Robert E. Sherwood; staging by Garson Kanin; settings designed and lighted by Jo Mielziner; gowns designed by Valentina; presented by the Playwrights' Company at Plymouth Theater, Saturday evening, November 10, 1945. The cast:

Jamieson	Emory Richardson
Hazel	Kay Loring
Major-Gen. MacGlory	Ernest Woodward
Morey Vinion	Spencer Tracy
Harriet Vinion	Martha Sleeper
George Bowsmith	Clinton Sundberg
Leggatt Burt	Lawrence Fletcher
Charlie	Henry Lascoe
Pete Kennedy	Ralph Cullinan
Fred	Nick Dennis
Gil Hartnick	Rex Williams
Edith Bowsmith	Jan Sterling
Firth	Theodore Leavitt
Albok	Paul Alberts
Dix	Sandy Campbell
Stapler	Lynn Shubert
Kavanagh	Sam Sweet
Ship's Doctor	Howard Ferguson
Costanzo	William Sands
Guffey	David Stone
Hal Fleury	Gordon Nelson
Col. Rainsford	Clay Clement
Gregorio Felizardo	Vito Christi
Doctor Querin	Edward Requello

Filipino soldiers and civilians: Robin Taylor, Simeon Ochoco, Frank DeSilva, Herbert Urbano, Cleto M. Olivoras, Theodora Racasa, Nita De Sota, Peggy Sanford, Annette Erlanger, Francisco Salvicion, Conrad De La Cruz, Eliseo Parrenas, Mamerto Ventura, John James.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

Sherwood Has Sound Play, Tracy A Fine Role in 'The Rugged Path'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The theatre is on the march again. After so many, many stumblebum entries since the new season opened, it has at last brought a drama which has in it the substance of the stage—good writing, good acting, news value, intelligent production and an idea.

The play is Robert E. Sherwood's "The Rugged Path," which the Playwrights' Company presented Saturday evening at the Plymouth Theatre. The star is Spencer Tracy, making his first appearance here since the electric "The Last Mile" 15 years ago—thanks to a "special arrangement" by a benevolent foundation known as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which occasionally rents its actors out for brief periods.

"The Rugged Path" is another drama about a newspaper editor, like J. M. Patterson's "The Fourth Estate" (1909), Elliott Nugent's "A Place of Our Own" (1945) and a good many in between. In the new play the disillusioned editor—and all newspapermen are supposed to be disillusioned in any form of literature, which is frequently the case in real life—this editor finds the America he thought had vanished in the mental and physical hell of World War II.

In this play Mr. Tracy returns, and this would be news whether he were good or not; for in Hollywood Mr. Tracy has become not only a top-ranking star in the public mind but also a star in the minds of his fellow picture folk. Out West he is the actors' actor—A man respected by others in his trade as being a master in his job. Fifteen years of working in another acting medium might easily have made him less able on the living stage just from lack of practice—but this has not happened. He is splendid, exciting and admirable.

A Top Sherwood.

With this play Mr. Sherwood returns, too, for the first time since his "There Shall Be No Night" was produced in 1940. This also is news, for Mr. Sherwood, who has written some fine plays, has figured importantly in the news dispatches of the recent war.

Mr. Sherwood has broken "The Rugged Path" into twelve scenes, and, in spite of the best ministrations of Designer Jo Mielziner, the business of moving these scenes on and off the stage while the curtain is down impedes the dramatic push of the play. Nevertheless I like "The Rugged Path" better than "Idiot's Delight" and "There Shall Be No Night." It has more clarity and unity.

The beginning of the story is not novel. Tracy is the editor of a paper and finds himself at the usual cross-purposes with the owner and the business office. It is 1940 and he has seen the war in Europe as a correspondent, and he believes we are in for it, too—but there are many in America, including his owner and the business office, who still believe the war is not our affair.

When Hitler moves on Russia, the editor agrees with a young, intelligent assistant that the paper must immediately support the Russian cause and advocate lend-lease to the Communists. They publish an editorial to this effect and there is hell to pay in the business office.

The editor resigns and joints the navy as a cook. He doesn't know just why he has done this, but he is looking for something because he is lost. He and his wife have drifted apart because he senses the changes impending in the world and she wants to keep things as they were.

Finds His America.

In the navy, on a destroyer in the Pacific, the editor finds what he has been groping for—America. The America of rugged folk, like the people of the Mayflower and the Alamo.

When the destroyer is sunk by enemy action the editor is the sole survivor. Landing from a raft among a group of guerrillas in the Jap-occupied Philippines, he finds that America is here, too, still. It is, this America, the one great light of hope in the world, like the big light over the White House door in Washington.

He gives his life for this America, fighting a desperate guerilla action, and is posthumously decorated at the White House. Just before he dies he gives a pep talk to the ragged, sorry little band of Filipinos he is leading.

In summary, "The Rugged Path" sounds like preachment, which can be very dull stuff on the stage. In performance, the play is soundly written and holding, and Mr. Tracy's encouragement of the Filipinos is a stirring piece of work. Most of the scenes are talk, rather than action—but the talk moves; and one scene aboard the embattled destroyer is exciting stagecraft.

The large company is excellently chosen and is admirably directed by Capt. Garson Kanin, of Hollywood and the Signal Corps. Among those giving sharp, clean performances are Martha Sleeper, Clinton Sundberg, Lawrence Fletcher, Rex Williams and Clay Clement.

Journal-American

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

'Rugged Path' At Plymouth

By ROBERT GARLAND

Admitting that "The Rugged Path" may bear half-heartedly to the left before it gives up winding, there is no earthly reason for even the most right-minded pedestrian to worry. The truth of the matter is that the conversational concoction Robert Sherwood has fashioned, the Playwrights' Company has sponsored, and Spencer Tracy has acted, is neither fish, fowl nor prime pink propaganda.

I don't see how anybody could view it with alarm, not even if he tried to. As exposed last Saturday night at the Plymouth Theatre, with direction by Garson Kanin and settings by Jo Mielziner, "The Rugged Path" adds nothing to a scant and backward theatrical season. Nor does it take anything away. At the present writing, Broadway remains in the doldrums where Mr. Sherwood found it.

If "The Rugged Path" is supposed to be a play, it is a dull one. If "The Rugged Path" is supposed to be propaganda, it is ineffectual. If "The Rugged Path" is supposed to be diverting, it is not.

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Hero at Sea

In 45th st., hard by Shubert Alley, it takes our playwright one act of half a dozen scenes to get Morey Vinton into the United States Navy. And it takes our playwright another act of half a dozen scenes to get him out again. Meantime, he moves slowly but unsurely from a room in the White House to his unhappy home, from his unhappy home to a downtown bar and grill, from a downtown bar and grill to a newspaper office in some made to order Never-Never Land.

This Morey Vinton who has such a trying time is Robert Sherwood's hero. He gets to be a hero by writing an unorthodox editorial for the orthodox family publication on which he is employed. On the other hand, one Leggatt Burt is Mr. Sherwood's villain. He gets to be a villain by complaining to the boss about the unorthodox editorial Morey Vinton has written. Just like that, really.

So Hero Vinton joins the Navy, takes to sea, is shipwrecked on Jo Mielziner's desert island, expires while defending Banana Beach and is decorated posthumously in Washington.

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One Act Plays

If this, or any part of it, has social significance, I can not find it. All I can see in the concoction at the Plymouth is a series of 12 one-act plays, some better than some others. These plays are tied together by the character known as Morey Vinton, a vague and vacillating creation who seems not to know what he wants or what he, as an American, believes in.

Spencer Tracy, seen on Broadway 15 years ago in "The Last Mile," brings charm and no little skill to a role that cries out loud for them. Martha Sleeper, as his wife, remains stubbornly two dimensional. Lawrence Fletcher is more alive as the lowdown Leggatt Burt from the advertising department. Clinton Sundberg is an editor I'm glad I never had to work for. Before this, he was a drama critic.

"The Rugged Path" is a twisting theatrical footway that leads exactly nowhere. Robert Sherwood has written it at the top of his voice and the bottom of his powers. It just doesn't amount to anything.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

'The Rugged Path' Will Find Going Too Rugged—But Soon

After this, I suppose, that admirable actor, Spencer Tracy, will follow his own hunches and not take the advice of well-intentioned friends. He didn't want to appear in the new Robert Sherwood play, "The Rugged Path," which opened at the Plymouth Saturday night.

He didn't like the play or his chore in it. He had been absent from Broadway for 15 years, during which he had built up a splendid reputation as a motion picture actor and had won two Academy Awards. He didn't think that, as a starring vehicle for him, "The Rugged Path" would do him any good.

Worst Ever.

He was right about that. But I doubt that the play will last long enough to do him any permanent harm.

But some people will go to see Mr. Tracy because they have admired him so much. They will see an unhappy actor, performing a role competently but obviously wondering how he ever allowed himself to be mixed up in such a mess. And they will forgive him; for not even "The Rugged Path" can knock Mr. Tracy out, even with all the blows it deals him below the belt.

It has been said Mr. Sherwood, the author of the play wrote, or helped to write, many of the late President Roosevelt's campaign speeches. "The Rugged Path" is not a play; it is a campaign speech. Mr. Sherwood doesn't understand this is 1945.

The play is in two acts of six scenes each. The scenes, which have been handsomely and expensively designed by Jo Mielziner, are: a room in the White House, 1940; the drawing room of an editorial writer's mansion on June 21, 1941, Kenneally's Bar & Grill, where, it seems, deep-thinking editorial writers and forward-looking reporters go to get stewed and damn the National Assn. of Manufacturers, all chambers of commerce, the free enterprise system, the boss who pays them a salary and to praise Communism; a newspaper proprietor's private office; an Army colonel's headquarters in the Philippines, and a jungle outpost.

Married Into Job.

Mr. Tracy, in the play, is an editorial writer on a newspaper, who has married himself into a job; for his wife is one of the owners, by inheritance, of the newspaper he works for. Mr. Tracy has been reading a subsidized weekly, which the widow of a J. P. Morgan capitalist has been supporting as a memorial to her departed husband; and Mr. Tracy has, through the wisdom in this magazine's pages, achieved some fixed ideas.

First, among these, is that he doesn't like his wife. Next is that unless one is on the public pay roll (as Mr. Sherwood has been for quite some time) one is simply a willing instrument of the NAM, of the members of the various chambers of commerce and all of other greedy capitalists in the American system. (It is interesting, by the way, to note that, under the system, which Mr. Sherwood does not care for, he has sold this horrible piece of tripe to the movies for a fantastic sum and a healthy cut in on the profits.)

In the play, Mr. Tracy doesn't love his wife any more than he loves the National Assn. of Manufacturers so he ups and joins the Navy. He wanted to join the Marines or get into the infantry but he was too old for that. He gets a job as a cook in the galley of a destroyer. . . . And how sweet he is there! Full of noblesse oblige.

He doesn't want any of the crew to know that he is a rich and famous newspaperman. He allows them all to call him "Cookie" and to beef about the way he cooks Spam. He is democratic as all hell.

Sounds in the Dark.

Now there is a 10-minute interval in which the lights of the theater go out and you can't see anything on the stage. Here you get a radio program of the kind Norman Corwin used to devise, with a lot of sound effects which sound exactly like sound effects.

You are led to believe, during this, that the destroyer has been sunk and that Mr. Tracy has died. . . . But no! Mr. Tracy has been dragged out of the sea. He turns up at Army colonel's headquarters, in a beleagured island in the Philippines, just in time to take over (when the Army is in a spot) and lead a task force on an important mission.

Mr. Tracy, leading 40 Equity extras, disguised as Filipinos, wins the objective but loses his life. He is posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, which his wife sends back, in a tremulous speech, to the Equity extras in recognition of their noble work.

Lastly there is a reprise of the first scene in the White House, in which the old Negro attendant, points to a full-length portrait of what seems to be Kelcey Allen and intones: "We all got to keep the old spirit of our forefathers alive."

I have never had a more repulsive night in the theater.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

'The Rugged Path'—Odyssey Of a Disillusioned Liberal

By Wilella Waldorf

In his new play, "The Rugged Path," which arrived at the Plymouth Theatre last Saturday evening, Robert E. Sherwood follows the wartime fortunes of a liberal newspaperman who has lost faith in America and in himself, but who finds the fighting spirit of our pioneer forefathers still alive in the galley of a destroyer, on a remote Pacific island, and finally in his own soul.

Now that the war is over, Mr. Sherwood is posing the question: Are we going to keep this militant faith to help us wrestle with the peace, or will we permit ourselves to sink back once more into the old complacency?

This is Mr. Sherwood's first play since "There Shall Be No Night," produced five years ago, and as is his wont, he gives his audience something to think about. This in itself is so rare an occurrence in the theatre these days that we rise to salute his return.

Having risen and saluted, however, it is necessary to sit down again and report that "The Rugged Path" is not the stirring, provocative mettlesome drama we had been hoping for from Mr. Sherwood's pen at this crucial point in the world's history.

The play is presented in two acts of six scenes each, the first covering Foreign Correspondent Morey Vinion's return after Dunkirk to assume the editorship of an important American newspaper, the second devoted to his wartime service as a ship's cook in the U. S. Navy and later as a guerrilla fighter in the Philippines.

Up to the intermission, "The Rugged Path" achieves a certain theatrical vitality growing out of the conflict between Vinion and his brilliant young assistant, Gil Hartnick, representing the liberal faction on the paper, versus the reactionary business manager, Leggatt Burt, allied with the uncertain young publisher, George Bowsmith, weak son of a once famous father.

But the battle is never really joined, for Vinion, after printing an editorial calling for aid to Russia following Hitler's sudden attack on the Soviet Union, is not sufficiently militant to make a stand on his convictions, although he is in an excellent position to assert his leadership and at least attempt to swing the young publisher around to his way of thinking whether some of the advertisers like it or not.

When Hartnick is fired—over little or no protest by Vinion—the disillusioned editor tosses newspaperdom overboard and joins the Navy, turning up next as ship's cook on a destroyer and later as the sole survivor of his craft washed up on a small Philippine island, where he dies fighting the Japs.

Spencer Tracy Returns

From the time Vinion quits his editorial job without attempting further to guide and enlighten his torpid fellow countrymen, "The Rugged Path" weakens in its dramatic drive and becomes merely a series of loosely strung together scenes, some interesting, some moving in passing, but of insufficient strength to develop a play of the mature intellectual calibre and decisive thinking expected from a dramatist of Mr. Sherwood's reputation and experience.

Despite Spencer Tracy's persuasive performance—his first Broadway appearance in fifteen years—we found it impossible to believe in Morey Vinion as a character. He struck us less and less as a person and more and more as a cardboard figure Mr. Sherwood was carting around the world to set up here and there for various people to talk at.

The Playwrights' Company has given the play a first-rate production smoothly directed by Captain Garson Kanin, well set by Jo Mielziner and excellently played by a large company of good actors. As it goes on, however, "The Rugged Path" is forced to rely far too heavily on such purely technical stage effects as the scene in which the Destroyer Townsend is sunk in battle, realistically done as it is with loud speakers and gradually dimming lights.

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PM Exclusive

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

—Kronenberger—

More a Maze Than a Path

PM Reviews

The Rugged Path brings us Robert Sherwood's first play in five years, and Spencer Tracy's first Broadway appearance in 15; and I wish I could say that its dramatic merit equalled its theatrical interest. But it allows me to do little more than pay my respects to some scattered virtues, and to Mr. Tracy's likeable acting. It is most palpably not a good play. No more is it, in general, a really animated piece of theater. It is not even, at this moment in time, a very provocative commentary on issues confronting the world. It lacks form, it lacks focus, it lacks dramatic content, it lacks intellectual density. It is tinged with good will and right thinking, but it is never penetrated by strong feelings or sharp convictions. It is as unimpeachable and as undynamic and as long-winded as the usual Sunday sermon.

Mr. Sherwood is writing, as a liberal, about a liberal—during the years 1940-45. His Morey Vinion is the 40-year-old editor of his brother-in-law's newspaper. The irresolute brother-in-law is bossed by a reactionary, isolationist, please-the-advertisers business manager; and when, after the Nazi invasion, Morey comes out for aid to Russia, there is a showdown. Thereupon Morey quits and joins the Navy.

Over-age for combat service, jibing at desk work, he is sent as cook on a destroyer to the Pacific. The destroyer is sunk, but Morey reaches a small island held by American and native guerrillas. He has a chance to be returned home on a submarine; but having found new meaning in the war, and new faith in the courage and decency of simple men, he pleads to stay on, and dies a hero's death.

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The Rugged Path, as you can see, is a quite plotless play, a chronicle rather than a story. You can describe it under a good many general heads. In one sense, it is another Making of a Hero. In a more vital sense, it is a sort of Liberal Pilgrim's Progress. In terms of its material, again, it is a sort of Remembrance of Things Just Past—a refresher course on the issues and activities of the War Years. Through it, in any case, moves Morey Vinion, partly a participant, partly an observer, partly a point of view, partly Robert E. Sherwood. All these things might seem to add up to a great deal. Actually, they have a way of cancelling one another out.

That *The Rugged Path* is seldom very dramatic—is really dramatic only once, in the tense and graphic sinking of the destroyer—does not damn it out of hand. It could still be an illuminating play of ideas. But, despite some spells of good talk and moments of eloquence, it is never that, either. It lacks outward form because it lacks inner propulsion. We may be glad for what Mr. Sherwood is saying of Morey Vinion, of the faith he found among good simple men, and the fate he shared with them. But we are not stirred or even stimulated by it. For one thing, it seems patly arrived at because it is not *psychologically* arrived at. It comes through as Robert Sherwood's message, not as Morey Vinion's emotion. Morey Vinion is a lot of things, but never the one important thing, never *"I was the man, I suffered, I was there."* Mr. Sherwood has carried Morey across five crucial years and several kinds of plays without integrating him.

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Indeed, everything Mr. Sherwood touches upon that is not beyond dispute seems decidedly nebulous. As a liberal "historian" and inquirer he has not faced up to very much. The liberal spirit may be vindicated in a hero's death, but the liberal position is not clarified by it; and a heroic death, on the stage, somehow never highlights the harshness of the issues—it inevitably softens it. Indeed, seeing a play like *The Rugged Path*, one wonders whether, however well intended, it can be considered a really serious play; whether jumbling together a whole lot of recent history, whether turning a scrapbook into a script, isn't just taking the easiest way. It seems a little like haphazardly hitting a lot of keys in the hope of stumbling on a fine, resonant chord. It is appealing to our memories instead of our minds. In any case, yesterday's battles have more connection with today's and tomorrow's than Mr. Sherwood manages to indicate.

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In his own person, Mr. Tracy gives a certain contour to Morey Vinton; his acting is likeable and natural and gives the play a human side. Martha Sleeper, as the wife, does what she can with a rather soppy part; and Clay Clement, as a colonel, and Lawrence Fletcher, as the business manager, are both very effective. Capt. Kanin's direction is efficient and clean-cut, and Jo Mielziner's sets are distinctly an asset. —Louis Kronenberger

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The New York Times

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

By LEWIS NICHOLS

To get the bleak news over with immediately: Robert E. Sherwood's first play in five years has not been written with his best pencil. It is "The Rugged Path," which opened at the Plymouth Saturday. In it, Mr. Sherwood has dropped the role of prophet and forceful advocate, which lent power to "There Shall Be No Night," and has become the historian. The new play is about the war and one individual's part in it, but the author is not comfortable in this backward glance. Unlike the weapons forged on his usual anvil, "The Rugged Path" is soft and a little shapeless. Even the presence of Spencer Tracy, who is too infrequent a visitor, cannot keep it from offering a long evening in the theatre, an evening that is alien to Mr. Sherwood's normal custom.

There is a distinct separation between the two parts of the new play, and that is one of its troubles. The first half deals with a newspaper man's awareness that Hitler and fascism must be stopped, and that America must help. The second finds the United States at war, with the former editor a cook on a destroyer until that is sunk and then with a guerrilla detachment on a small Philippine island.

In the first part, Mr. Sherwood pays his respects to isolationism, to the doctrine of business over all, to the superficial liberals. The first part offers the leading character as a representative of a sincere and honest class. In the second, he seems to be representing only himself. He no longer is a generality, as it were, but has become a single man with one man's adventures. The over-all idea is lost in the special case.

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In any Sherwood play there are brisk lines and sharp jabs which must hurt when they land. "The Rugged Path" has them. But the play also too often has the air of the lecture platform. During the first half there is little action or plain theatrical drama, and the remarks on the state of the world and its dangers seem to come from the pen of Mr. Sherwood rather than the characters or incidents.

Curiously enough, the arguments of the first part now seem dated, not that the world has become perfect or that the arguments no longer are valid, but they are old in the present context. The second half does away with political theory and simple frightening fact and goes into straight adventure story. The best scenes of the play are there; one, showing the sinking of the destroyer, is gripping. But the second half, too, tells a story that has been told before, and it offers no surprises.

Mr. Tracy is the newspaper man who has wandered all over Europe as disaster is approaching. Back home again, he becomes the editor of his late father-in-law's paper, and he is not happy in his relationship with the business office. His decision to run an editorial backing Russia at the time of the German invasion brings a storm over his head, and so he resigns to join the Navy. He is a bad cook, but when the destroyer is sunk in action, he becomes a better guerrilla. He is killed during a Japanese attack on the island beach he is defending, and the last scene is a White House room just after the President had awarded him a posthumous Medal of Honor.

* * *

No newspaper man could ask a better model than Mr. Tracy. Leisurely and assured, he is one of the most likable members of the fourth estate and whatever estate it is to which actors belong. His Morey Vinion is an honest man, an able editor and a quizzical cynic; the performance is indeed fine. But Morey Vinion is almost the only cleanly written part.

Martha Sleeper, as the wife, has a courtesy role; Mrs. Vinion is the most casual background material. Clinton Sundberg and Lawrence Fletcher, as the publisher and business manager, are just enough on the side of parody to be ineffective seriously and not enough to be funny as such. Clay Clement does well as the colonel of the guerrillas, as does Rex Williams as the author of the disputed editorial.

The Playwrights' Company has given "The Rugged Path" an impressive production, with a large cast, Capt. Garson Kanin to direct and with excellent settings by Jo Mielziner. But Mr. Sherwood's official welcome home must be postponed until the next one after "The Rugged Path."

The Sun

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

Sherwood's 'The Rugged Path,' Well Acted by Tracy, More Message Than Play.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Robert E. Sherwood, returning to the trade of playmaking after an absence of five years, has written a drama of ideas in "The Rugged Path" and has gone about his work with vehemence and deep intensity, but the new play is lacking in dramatic progression. It is much more message than it is good theater.

"The Rugged Path," carefully and even prodigally produced by the Playwrights' Company, and superbly played by Spencer Tracy, opened Saturday evening at the Plymouth and was received by a rather distinguished and frequently excitable audience.

Tracy, in the role of a restless, liberal-minded editor who goes to war for the peace of his soul and the justification of his faith, gives a solid, under-playing performance in a role that is never an easy one. The character of Morey Vinion is given to speech-making and fluency of phrase, and Tracy's naturalness in certain trying moments is indeed a tribute to his ingrained skill as an actor. He went westward years ago after his triumph in "The Last Mile." He returns apparently unharmed by stardom of the screen.

In "The Rugged Path," Robert Sherwood, displaying touches of an unaccountable hostility for the American press, is concerned with the indecisiveness of America when the forces of Hitler menaced the freedom of the world. He is sharply critical of what he considers the apathy of the isolationist newspapers at the time of crisis, and as he sounds a warning against the slowness of our awakening he also comments upon the narrow margin between Allied victory and defeat. No wider at one time, he observes, than the English Channel. No wider at another than a street in Stalingrad.

"The Rugged Path" begins in December of 1940. Morey Vinion, renowned for his foreign correspondence, is greatly disturbed by the spread of Fascism and the march of Hitler's armies. When Germany invades Russia he publishes an editorial supporting lend-lease aid for Russia. The editorial provokes bitter protest from the newspaper's business office, which seems to be running things. Morey quits, joins the Navy, and becomes a cook aboard a destroyer. The ship is sunk by Jap air attack and he is cast ashore on a small island of the Philippines. There, welcomed by an American Colonel and a band of Filipino guerrillas, and commissioned as a Captain, he is assigned with his makeshift command to hold a strip of beach during the unloading of an Allied submarine, which has brought ammunition and supplies. Morey is killed in the action, dying the death that he sought, and is posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

All of this is told in twelve scenes and two acts in an elaborate production, well designed by Jo Mielziner. All of it is told to the careful direction of Garson Kanin and to the thoughtful prose of an intellectual playwright. But strong dramatic impact in "The Rugged Path" is missing. It goes in too much for sermonizing. The strung-together scenes do not produce a cumulative effect. And some of Sherwood's characters, Morey Vinion included, and certainly that of the smug and bullying business head of the newspaper, fail to take on sufficient reality. A fine production and some good actors are not enough to make a real play of "The Rugged Path."

There are some excellent performances. Clinton Sundberg, for instance, does quite a job as the boss's weak son who inherited the paper, is quite bewildered by it all, and wishes he were in a bank. Lawrence Fletcher is a compelling actor as the business office executive who wants the news played to please the advertisers, and who has far more influence on the editorial policy of his particular paper than that of any such executive I've ever known. Martha Sleeper strives to bring some reality to the sketchily written role of Morey's unloved and neglected wife. Ralph Cullinan, Rex Williams, Gordon Nelson and Edward Raquello do well with small parts.

"The Rugged Path" contributes a service in returning Spencer Tracy to his natural profession. And certainly another in bringing Robert E. Sherwood back into the theater, for which he has done a great deal. But his new drama, for all its eloquence, misses as a play.

"Are You With It?"

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

'Are You With It?' Is Comfortable Fun

By ALTON COOK

That traffic jam up near Central Park could be all the show stopping numbers in "Are You With It?" the new musical comedy that came into the Century Saturday night. Things were wet and miserable outside but the week end certainly blew in with a lot of snug and comfortable fun at the Century.

It is hard to decide just where to start telling about this show. Producers Richard Kollmar and James Gardiner have been so prodigal with talented people. For instance, long before the first act was over, you simply had to give up keeping track of the tap dancers that kept prancing out. And new ones were still coming in the second act.

For my money, the head man of all this merriment is Lew Parker, an amiable rapscallion from whom all previous obscurity vanished very suddenly Saturday night. He is a man with an air of low larceny about him but all he really is intending to steal is the show, which he does, scene by scene, as often as they allow him out on the stage. This comedian is full of robust vulgarity, the kind that is always likable and never shocking, no matter what outrages against propriety he is called upon to commit. Such a nice, nasty man!

The main idea behind all the fun is the sudden transplanting of a prim young actuary into the raucous carnalities of a carnival, a tent show run by rascals proud of their felonies. His lifetime of devotion to mathematics has put him in just the mood to tackle a new field of feminine figures.

Lew Parker is my boy but there is plenty of room for argument. I couldn't blame anyone for lavishing his entire allegiance on the wicked leers of Dolores Gray, a girl who makes it very apparent that nothing is sacred. She can work insinuations into the cleanest of songs and the ones she gets in this show are hardly that.

Or it would not be hard to make a dream girl of Jane Dulo, who has a suggestion of the best days of Ethel Merman with her casual manner of sauntering through a song or a gag. Or you could be all out for Johnny Downs and his way of making respectability seem mirthfully absurd. There will be lots of superlatives, too, for Joan Roberts, one of the most likely lasses who came from "Oklahoma."

"Are You With It?" does not depend much on its music or its book. The ample charms of the evening spring entirely from a wonderful company of people and some sly writing that went into lines of both dialogue and lyrics. I particularly recall one miss' plea for an end of women's rights: "Let us learn to be adept in the art of being kept."

Oldsters who recall Jack Powell and the exciting combination he worked out of simultaneous drumming and dancing will be overjoyed when they see his son, Hal Hunter, carrying on in the same style at the Century. Imagination as well as agility also went into the dancing of Lou Wills Jr., Duke McHale and Bunny Briggs, who set all of us non-hoofers mourning the errors of a misspent life.

There is one suggestion that should be made to the box office man of this show. Next time he goes in to work, he might check the street signs near the theater and make a note of the address. On the opening night tickets, he was nine blocks off and had my forlorn wife wandering around in the rain. Saturday was no night for it.

"ARE YOU WITH IT?"

A musical comedy, presented by Richard Kollmar and James W. Gardiner Jr., at the Century Theater, November 10, 1945. Book by Sam Perrin and George Balzer. Music by Harry Revel. Lyrics by Arnold B. Horwitt. Directed by Edward Reveaux. Musical numbers staged by Jack Donohue. Settings and lighting by George Jenkins. Costumes by Willa Kim from sketches by Raoul Pene Du Bois. Musical director, Will Irwin. Vocalizations arranged by M. Clay Warnick. The cast:

Margo Keller	Jane Dulo
Mr. Bixby	Sydney Boyd
Mr. Mapleton	Johnny Stearns
Wilbur Haskins	Johnny Downs
Vivian Reilly	Joan Roberts
Policeman	Duke McHale
"Goldie"	Lew Parker
Bartender	Lou Wills Jr.
Carter	Lew Eckels
Snake Charmer's Daughter	Jane Deering
Cicero	Bunny Briggs
Cleo	June Richmond
Balloon Seller	Mildred Jocelyn
Bunny La Fleur	Dolores Gray
Sally Swivelhips	Diane Adrian
Georgette	Buster Shaver
Olive	Olive
George	George
Richard	Richard
Strong Man	William Lundy
Office Boy	Hal Hunter
1st Musician	Lou Hurst
2nd Musician	David Lambert
3rd Musician	Jerry Lucas
4th Musician	Jerry Packer
Loren	Loren Welch

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

'Are You With It?' Bounces Right in as Best New Musical

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

There is an amateur sailor out in the Pacific, somewhere, whose name is Arnold Horwitt. He wrote the lyrics for "Are You With It?", the musical show which opened Saturday night. It must be pretty discouraging to be 5,000 or 6,000 miles away from your own Broadway debut, but Arnold doesn't have to worry too much. "Are You With It?" will still be open whenever he gets home.

This is the first good, old-fashioned musical since "Panama Hattie." Yet on paper everything is against it. It has no social significance. None of the writers was marked by Freud or frustration. It has no big stars. And, of course, the book is as silly as most musical books.

But it moves so fast that whatever it lacks is happily overlooked. The youngsters and unknowns who are assembled on the stage are refreshing, talented and completely unlike the precocious upstarts who have been the recent vogue. Further, the sets are by George Jenkins and the costumes by Raoul Pene du Bois and Willa Kim; which means the whole thing is in startlingly original and basically sound good taste.

Everybody's Fine.

When Buster Shaver and his three midgets, who have grown old playing Loew's State, can take the first act next-to-closing spot in an $8 premiere and stop the works cold, you can get some idea of this show's pace and novelty. Particularly since a lot of virtual unknowns had been stopping it cold every few minutes previously.

Joan Roberts, hitherto concerned with moonish ballads only, does Irish jigs, comedy songs and rhythm. With this show she'll probably take her place as the town's No. 1 musical gal. Lew Parker (see previous reference to Loew's State) is an easygoing funnyman who throws lines away like a real trouper and casually refers to whisky as civilian plasma. A gal from the radio named Dolores Gray, who reminds you of Lyda Roberti, handles a handful of comedy songs with aplomb and is so handsome in a naked sort of way that you nearly climbed up over the footlights after her.

Johnny Downs is an amiable and able juvenile. Young Jane Dulo should some day be a top comedienne. Two boys named Duke McHale and Lou Wills Jr.—who are they?—were a smash with tap and acrobatic specialties. A roly-poly Negro singer named June Richmond, right down from Harlem's Apollo, did a great job with a blues song, "Poor Little Me."

The score is okay, if not exactly epochal. "This Is My Beloved" and "Here I Go Again" are two nice ballads and "Cozy Little Cottage of Tomorrow" is more amusing than most such Porterish novelties.

There are several scenes just dirty enough to be funny. Parker wanders in and out of the book, lifting it up when necessary, and when he isn't around somebody or other jumps right in to sing a fast song or do a faster dance.

The book? Oh, the hell with the book. Something about a carnival and the insurance business.

"Are You With It?"—*continued*

The Sun

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

'ARE YOU WITH IT?'

Richard Kollmar and James W. Gardiner made their bid to supply Manhattan with a bright new musical hit Saturday night with the premiere of "Are You With It?" at the Century Theater, and the news today is that they have presented the town with a fast stepping and colorful show that has plenty to recommend it.

Sam Perrin and George Balzer have adapted their book from George Malcolm-Smith's novel "Slightly Perfect." It was a good idea. The adventures of a conscientious and temporarily discouraged Hartford insurance table expert, lured by a carnival sharpster into putting his knowledge of percentages to new uses, lend themselves excellently to musical comedy purposes, and for most of the evening the plot itself is one of the assets of "Are You With It?" The "it" in the title, incidentally, is the traveling show business.

The authors are aided immeasurably by the clowning of Lew Parker. From the moment he bobs up as the bland and persuasive "Goldie," seeking to sell a phantom mop to the downcast insurance man, he gives the proceedings a lift, and when he is operating his wheel of chance or hunting for hidden papers in a railway car compartment, he is as comical a fellow as any audience could ask for.

Unfortunately, all of the humor is not as hearty. Now and then, both in its lyrics and gags, "Are You With It?" leans too readily on double entendre and on one occasion tumbles headlong into very bad taste. On the debit side, too, is the fact that the first act needs cuting. The show has the merit, however, of getting better as it goes along.

Harry Revel has contributed a score that is gay and easy to listen to. You'll be hearing "Here I Go Again" often in the weeks ahead. The dancing is lively and skillful. It offers just a trifle too much tapping, however, even with Lou Wills Jr., Duke McHale and Bunny Briggs stepping nimbly.

Joan Roberts, once of "Oklahoma," is charming and sings well as the insurance girl who loves the expert, and Johnny Downs is excellent, too, as the lad with the mathematical brain. Given a song like "You Gotta Keep Saying 'No'," Dolores Gray knows exactly what to do with it, and as a carnival show girl she is an amusing teammate for Parker.

A novel silhouette stunt gets "Are You With It?" off to a good start. As a whole, it may not be exactly the show Broadway has been searching for. Momentarily, at least, it will do very nicely, however.

HERRICK BROWN.

New York Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

By Otis L. Guernsey Jr.

Above the Average

THE current season has finally produced a new musical with a spark of life in it. "Are You With It?" the Richard Kollmar-James W. Gardiner offering which opened Saturday night at the Century, does not always maintain the swift gayety for which it strives; but a host of singing, dancing and talent work unceasingly to brighten the corners of the piece. Backed up by a riot of color and a syncopated score, such performers as Joan Roberts, Johnny Downs, Lew Parker, Dolores Gray and June Richmond manage to overcome handicaps of bad taste and weak material, lifting "Are You With It?" above the recent musical average.

* * *

The show is played against a carnival background, with Johnny Downs as a stuffy insurance man who runs away from his job to join a troupe of itinerant players. This setting allows the cast to drop the book by Sam Perrin and George Balzer where it falls and concentrate on building a variety show into the proceedings. Too many of the gags are bedroom chestnuts, and the lyrics by Arnold B. Horwitt also contain labored comedy, but Harry Revel's music is better adapted for individual effort. The score is all in a sprightly, swingy mood, with such numbers as the love song "Slightly Perfect," "Poor Little Me," "You Gotta Keep Saying 'No'" and the title song permitting lively song-and-dance salesmanship.

Chief among the sellers is Lew Parker as a wheel-of-fortune concessionnaire, who creates rowdy humor in many of the sketches by sheer force of comedy personality and timing. He is paired in the winking rough stuff with Dolores Gray as a blonde, hip-swinging kootch dancer; together they trade musical wisecracks about the future mechanized home, and she puts over a number about a U. S. O. girl overseas. Downs is a triple-threat musical comedy hero who tap-dances, sings duets with Joan Roberts and is always convincing as a scholarly youth whose head is turned by carnival color. Miss Roberts has a charming voice which never lacks for melody in either fast or near-lyrical numbers, although her version of a sweet young thing needs a bit of directorial repression.

* * *

Other notable variety breaks are provided by the corpulent June Richmond, who stops the show with a song incongruously entitled "Poor Little Me"; by three singing and dancing midgets who are billed as Olive, George and Richard; by Lou Wills jr. and Bunny Briggs, who have solo numbers, and by Hal Hunter who drums fast rhythms on the stage furniture. A gaudy and amusing circus pantomine, featuring Jane Deering in a ballet role, makes a satisfactory climax to Act I. The carnival background allows a free scope for imagination in the George Jenkins scenery, and some of the costumes actually run the gamut of the spectrum from red hat down to violet shoes. The Edward Reveaux staging gives the show a breathless haste wherever possible. Though "Are You With It?" doesn't always run at the same speed, it performs well enough in the sprints to finish in the money.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

'Are You With It?' Gives Broadway A Long-Awaited Musical Comedy Hit

By Ben Rosenberg

"Are You With It?" is a musical comedy built on a well-developed story of a young life insurance actuary whose misplaced decimal point sends him careening into the carnival business. High-pressure salesmanship is needed in those lines of endeavor, but the Kollmar-Gardiner product put on display for the first time at the Century Theatre Saturday night literally sells itself. In other words, Broadway has another hit show on the boards.

Of course, "Are You With It?" has its faults. It's a bit too long, for one thing, and it sags slightly in the second act, especially toward the finish, but there are enough lively, tuneful numbers, fast-paced music, rollicking comedy, pretty girls and good story to offset those weaknesses. In fact it's what Broadway has been waiting for—a musical stripped of pretentiousness, minus the heavy ballet that burdened earlier but forgotten musicals this season. Jane Deering, however, performs two solo numbers that are welcome additions to the show.

"Are You With It?" slips into high gear right at the start with a clever silhouette of apartment dwellers rising from their beds. It serves to introduce a song, "Five More Minutes in Bed," that you'll hear often. Jane Dulo clicks in that one, as she does later in "Send Us Back to the Kitchen." "This Is My Beloved" and "Here I Go Again," both sung by Joan Roberts, are bound to become candidates for the Hit Parade. Joan's pleasing voice does much to enrich the words.

The laughs are in the capable hands of Lew Parker. Some of the jokes are a bit overripe, corny and off color, but we're more than willing to be generous when reminded of the vast amount of corn that "pooped" in previous musicals this season. Mr. Parker plays the part of the carnival barker who induces Johnny Downs, the insurance actuary, to join the show. Johnny is the mathematical genius who sticks to one figure—Joan Roberts—when it comes to tabulating heart throbs. He makes a handsome and personable Romeo.

Lou Wills Jr. and Duke McHale do some fancy and agile stepping in a barroom scene for deserved bows. Bunny Briggs is another who rates a nod for nimbleness of foot. June Richmond is side-splitting when she sings "Poor Little Me." Dolores Gray is more satisfying when she swings a sinuous hip than when swinging into a song. Buster Shaver and his midgets put on their vaudeville act. It fits in well with the carnival flavor of the show.

"Are You With It?" is based on the novel, "Slightly Imperfect." It derives its title from the phrase carnival folk employ in inquiring whether one is a member of their profession. Its smoothness of production reflects excellent direction by Edward Reveaux. The settings, costumes and lighting effects are adequate. "Are You With It?" will be with us for a long time.

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PM

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

—Hague—

Not More Than Half With It

PM Reviews

It looked for a while Saturday night as though *Are You With It?*, which was making its local bow at the Century, might be the new musical that Broadway had been hoping for—something to give the season a lift, something to make up for the egregious errors of a *Mr. Strauss*, a *Polonaise* and a *Girl from Nantucket*. Nothing distinctive, mind you. Just a breezy, conventional book show with a few laughs, a couple of good songs and some lively hoofing (there was no "choreographer" listed in the program), a show that didn't aim too high and wouldn't fall too low.

For the musical comedy which has been contrived from George Malcolm-Smith's novel about Wilbur, the mathematical wizard of an insurance company who one day misplaces an important decimal point and is shamed into running away and joining a carnival troupe, starts off well enough. We see the front of a Hartford boarding house which, as alarm clocks go off, becomes partly transparent, revealing the inmates—most of them shapely young ladies—in silhouette, arising from their beds, bathing and dressing with fascinating realism. Then Jane Dulo, backed up by an attractive, fast-stepping chorus, sings the praises of *Five More Minutes in Bed*, a pretty universal bit of wishful thinking. So far, so good.

Next we meet Wilbur (Johnny Downs) and his girl Vivian (Joan Roberts). They sing a pleasantly innocuous song, and it is nice to find Miss Roberts singing better than she did in her *Oklahoma!* days and acting more natural than she did as the high-born heroine of *Marinka*. There's a scene in a bar, happily designed by George Jenkins, where Duke McHale and Lou Wills, Jr., knock themselves out with bourbon and tap-dancing, and pretty soon we're introduced to small-time carnival life by the members of the Acres of Fun troupe.

There's Goldie, "part-time" bum and wheel of chance operator, played by Lew Parker, a personable comedian from radio who can make a grade-C gag sound almost funny; there's Cleo, the fat woman, portrayed by June Richmond, who effectively shouts and clowns a ditty, *Poor Little Me*; there's tent-show dancer Bunny Le Fleur, in the person of Dolores Gray, who puts over the title number, *Are You With It?* ("Are you on the beam, a Joe in the know"), with fetching voice, legs and torso; and finally, there's Olive, George and Richard, three gen-you-ine midgets, who charmingly sing-and-dance a number about "design for living on a small scale."

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But all these talented people soon find themselves stranded; they're hindered rather than abetted by the material given them to work with. Before the long first act is over, the book begins to get in the way, the pace lags; you begin to wish the songs had more of a lilt, the lyrics more point; you notice the lack of variety and originality in the chorus routines and the specialty dances all of them tap. And just before the act ends comes the *coup de grace*, an elaborate and badly staged production number—call it "ballet" if you will—titled *Vivian's Reverie*, which is supposed to recreate everyone's dream of the circus but turns, I'm afraid, into a very dull nightmare instead.

Nor do things pick up after the intermission. There are more tap dances, more grade-B songs, more plot complications. These last involve the proprietor of the carnival who has been trying to swindle Wilbur's insurance company. Since he can only be identified by a birthmark on a usually secluded part of his anatomy a great deal of low comedy ensues.

Miss Gray continues to look stunning and by sheer weight of personality makes a cheap song about the passes made by soldiers at USO girls, *You Gotta Say No*, seem almost acceptable and, with Parker, perks things up considerably with a better and almost bright number, *In Our Cozy Little Cottage of Tomorrow*. At least it seemed almost bright, but maybe that was because I saw the finale came next on the program.

All in all, *Are You With It?* does not add up to a full evening's entertainment. And the sad fact remains that Broadway is still waiting for a good new musical.

—ROBERT A. HAGUE

Journal and American

NOVEMBER 12, 1945

'Are You With It?' 'Opens at Century

By JIM O'CONNOR

Are you tired of folk-lore plays with music? Are you weary of highbrow productions? Are you wary of prancing princes and coloratura sopranos? Are you in favor of a good, old-fashioned, rousing American song and dance show?

If you are, you have the answer in "Are You With It?" "It" raced into the Century Theatre on Saturday night and is off on its Broadway run. "Hurry! Hurree! Hur-REE!" is the slogan.

The plot, concocted by Sam Perrin and George Balzer out of "Slightly Perfect," a novel by George Malcolm-Smith, concerns a young insurance actuary who shatters his career by misplacing a decimal point. To forget his disgrace, the youth runs away from the office and joins a traveling carnival. His sweetheart follows; they uncover an insurance fraud; the boss forgives them; and all ends well, after two acts and 19 scenes, many of them elaborate.

This is more plot than customary in musical comedies, but it's not allowed to interfere with the gay songs, vigorous dances and spirited specialties. "Are You With It?" is carnival lingo, meaning "Are you with the troupe?" or "Are you hep?"

Joan and Johnny

Johnny Downs, from Hollywood, is the ingratiating young insurance man. Charming Joan Roberts, of the operettas, provides the heart throb.

Following her leads in "Oklahoma!" and "Marinka," Joan, the sweet singer, has developed into a cute comedienne. Her travesty on ballet dancing is one of the treats in "A. Y. W. I?" But most of the comedy is handled—and handled well—by the untiring Lew Parker, of the airways.

The production scored at the start with a clever silhouette scene—a form of entertainment so old that it's new again.

"Are You With It?" has color and pep. It has gorgeous costumes by Raoul Pene DuBois. It has striking sets by George Jenkins, especially the midway at the carnival. It has a good-looking, hard-working chorus, although Jack Donohue has staged better dance routines.

Movies, radio, night clubs and light operas all contributed talent to the merry melange that is "Are You With It?" Even burlesque reared its lowbrow. Some of the lines and business are rather "blue," so don't bring Aunt Emma unless she can tell a few, too.

The whole production has the bounce and bang of an Olsen and Johnson show, which it resembles even to the loud colored suits on the comedians. The orchestra, under the baton of Will Irwin, also was loud—in keeping with the carnival spirit, I suppose.

Tuneful Tunes

Memorable melodies by Composer Harry Revel are "Here I Go Again," sung by Joan Roberts and quartette; "You Gotta Keep Saying 'No'" put over with finesse by Dolores Gray; "This Is My Beloved," by Johnny Downs and and Joan, and "Just Beyond the Rainbow," shouted tunefully by big June Richmond. You'll be hearing them hummed and whistled about.

It's apparent expense was no obstacle for Producers Richard Kollmar and James W. Gardiner. Despite pruning in Philadelphia, "Are You With It?" still gives you too much for your money—a rare fault, these days. It was about 11:30 when the curtain came down Saturday night. And, for all I know, the onlookers are still applauding. It was that kind of an audience.

There is no question about "Are You With It?". It is a good show, a very good show—a musical comedy with music and with comedy.